

An Examination of the Views of Edward Irving
concerning
The Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph. D.

by

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PREFACE

This study of the views of Edward Irving on the person and work of Jesus Christ has been long delayed in its preparation. It is to be hoped that the time which has elapsed since its inception has served a beneficent purpose. It was Charles Darwin who wrote of one of his books, long postponed: "The delay in this case, as with all my other books, has been a great advantage to me; for a man after a long interval can criticise his own work, almost as well as if it were that of another person."

The material on which this study is based takes in the full range from the coarse venom of the London pamphleteer to the strong words of Thomas Carlyle. Irving himself wrote volume after volume, and the student is almost embarrassed by the material from the pen of this eccentric preacher. Whole sections of this first-hand material dealing with subjects prophetic were passed by as irrelevant to the theme. The "Life" by Mrs. Oliphant is most readable and gives an attractive picture of the hero. But the sentimentalism of the book casts a shade upon its historical value, and the student is thrown back on accounts of the life which, though less complete, were written shortly after his time.

The form which this examination has taken may appear too logical and analytical for the transient utterances of this wielder of words. The general scheme follows the life of Irving with chapters given to a consideration of his general religious background, the delineation of his particular views on the person and work of Jesus Christ and finally a critical summary of his contribution. The views on theology have been pictured in the setting of the life. The lack of arrangement in the writings of Irving forces upon the student the formulation of some logical order.

Moreover, the writer is conscious again and again of an over-critical spirit toward the ideas of Irving. It has been hard to describe without criticising, for the peculiarities are so glaring. Comments of criticism have been inserted into paragraphs of description, instead of being reserved for a later critical summary. But the constant criticism has served at least one purpose in the formulation of the writer's ideas on some of these subjects. If these studies are intended to develop the student's own thinking, this examination of the views of

Edward Irving has served its purpose. For the pendulum of theological belief has in many lines swung to the opposite extreme from that of Irving.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my faculty advisers, Professor H.R. Mackintosh and Principal Hughes, for their help and advice in launching this thesis. The task was greatly simplified by the splendid collection of books on the subject in the library of New College, and I want to express my appreciation of the librarian there who granted me many privileges.

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Chapter I.

Edward Irving

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Chapter I.

Edward Irving

The memory of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch Church, London, has faded too soon. Within a century after his death the religious world has forgotten him, except as the founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church⁽¹⁾ and the propounder of a misunderstood doctrine of our Lord's human Nature. It must be confessed that even to his contemporaries the position which he occupied seemed to be a doubtful one; his earliest biographer writing a year after Irving's death said, "Irving was a meteor in the moral and religious world, a nine days wonder." And Thomas Carlyle, at one time Irving's closest friend, looked upon him as upon one who had "vanished tragically, and fled into oblivion and darkness, like a bright dream!"⁽²⁾ Few young ministers have come to their work with higher hopes; Irving sought to bring in a better type of Christianity, "as broad as thought and experience."⁽³⁾ And seldom has the public accorded a minister a more immediate and startling sign of approval. But although London flocked in crowds to hear him, this strange wonder from Scotland, he reigned

(1) The Catholic Apostolic Church refuses to be called the "Irvingite Church", probably because its universal claims are not compatible with the idea of sectarianism. It is clear however that there would be no such church today if Irving's genius had not exerted its power.

(2) Carlyle's Reminiscences Vol. II edited by C.E. Norton - London 1887 Chapter on "Edward Irving".

(3) Farewell Address to the Congregation of St. John's, Glasgow. June 1822 page 22.

as the popular idol for only a day, and his voice was drowned in a babel of tongues.

A number of elements contributed to the obscurity in which his memory now rests. His style of utterance was not the natural one of his day, and it is a trial of the modern reader's patience to find the path of thought through the wilderness of words. Sterling said, "His unceasing vehemence makes me dizzy," "His polemical violence repels."⁽¹⁾ It is but fair to say that in his early years he could write in a natural, smooth-flowing manner, as, for example, in his little tale, "The Loss of the Abeona." Nevertheless when his genius had ripened somewhat, his language became that of the King James' translation of the Bible, and his general style came to be consciously modelled after that of Hooker and Jeremy Taylor.⁽²⁾ He is verbose and his wordy reasoning leads one back and forth over the same ground, although because it is in an ever-changing verbal dress the reader is not always aware of this repetition of thought. Carlyle characterized his sermons as "those grand forest-avenues of his, with their multifarious outlooks to right

(1) Sterling's Life xlvii

(2) The Orations - preface to third edition Dec. 1, 1823.

(1)
and left". Preacher-like, Irving is so busy going into these digressions that he does not carry us very far into the hazy depths of his subject. He is so occupied with making sure through infinite repetition the ground he has taken that he seldom goes deep. But whether he makes any real progress or not, he generally goes with the same dignified, ponderous step through every subject, light or abstruse. If some of his writings remind one of an organ, it is pertinent to observe that he uses the full organ with its sonorous stateliness all of the time. All of which is to say that Irving's style warns the reader off at the first approach.

But if we may ignore this superficial obstruction, it still remains true that what good is contained in the many volumes from his hand is cast into the shadow by the extravagances into which he fell. His wordy utterances seem to lose what weight they may have when it is found that the same writer speaks with perfect confidence of the vials and trumpets of the Apocalypse and stands up to defend the wild gibberish of modern gifts of tongues. Can any sound good come from a mind so devoid of common sense?

Then, to cap the climax of obscurity, we lose the thread of the true and the valuable in Irving's writings

(1) Carlyle's Reminiscences.

when we see the blind maze of millennialism and miraculous gifts in the church that is associated with his name. Others, leaders in the Catholic Apostolic Church, have built upon the foundation which he laid, and the dwarfed structure of their pretentious hopes has given the lie to the greatness of the founder.

With these obstacles to his true appreciation cleared away, the real values in the work of Edward Irving come to light. On the very lowest basis Irving is valuable as a study in theological thinking. A heretic may not be able to tell us new truths, but what he does tell us of error may lead us to a surer grasp of the truth. What led to his heresy may be a truth half-understood or only dimly appreciated by the orthodox of his day. And so, even if we put the label of "heresy" on all that he wrote, Irving may warrant some consideration and study as an example to others of wrong emphases and faulty logic. In Irving's case this argument has stronger force because he is so natural. At no time is he really subtle, for the demands of his pulpit work prevented any nice adjustment of doctrine. To produce the tremendous volume of work that bears his name he must have been a very hasty writer. A burning pen has little time for careful distinctions. But with that natural impetuosity Irving plunges on to the very end of the line of argument to which he has set himself. If the result is absurd heresy, then it will appear as such in the boldest outline,

dressed in no conciliatory terms. Having arrived at such a conclusion Irving continues to hold it up before the world on every possible occasion. Courageous soul that he was he flaunts his peculiar doctrines before the world, restating them in an infinite variety of ways. Simply as a study in heresy the theology of Edward Irving has distinct value.

But there is a further consideration which puts this worth on a more positive basis. We may look upon him as a heretic, but even as we are doing so we are brought to the realization that these apparent absurdities are his strenuous reaction to other orthodox absurdities in his religious environment. Irving was not alone in peculiarity of doctrine concerning the Christ. Campbell and Erskine were also at variance with church Christology. The value of Campbell's reaction has been clearly demonstrated. It is not impossible that Irving too can point us to a deeper appreciation of the Christ, even though he cannot give perfect utterance to the urge that he feels.

Edward Irving deserves a calmer judgment from the church which rejected him, as from all Christians. There was much that was erratic and rash in the words of Irving. That is unmistakable. Yet we ought to come to a consideration of his work with a calm, if biased, mind, expecting some good even from what is already branded as heretical.

1. Life until 1827.

Edward Irving was born on August 4, 1792 in the village of Annan. On the same date Shelley, the poet of the romantic school, first saw the light. Both lives were troubled by controversy and confusion, "out of joint" with contemporary life. But as subsequent events showed these two men were of opposite temper, the one conservative and the other radical. Neither seems to have been conscious of the existence of the other.

There was little in the early life of Irving to mark it out from the others around it. He was brought up in a good religious home, not different from thousands of other Scotch homes in that day. At one time in later life Irving claimed descent from certain Waldensian Howys,⁽¹⁾ but there is little to indicate that at home he was in contact with anything that savoured of non-conformity. Carlyle records visits on Sunday afternoons to the preaching services of a Seceder minister in Ecclefechan. But such preaching was probably more orthodox than the orthodox.

The only distinguishing features that emerge from this earliest period are his great physical energy and his ability in mathematics. Irving could

(1) Mrs. Oliphant's Life of Edward Irving Vol. I page 120

row, swim, jump better than many of his fellows, and this sheer physical stamina was the one thing that carried him through the arduous years of his ministry. It was also an element which made those later years more arduous, for the very physical energy of the man gave too complete a support to the active brain. He overran the bounds of accepted religion by very
 (1)
 excess of bodily power.

Irving's ability in mathematics was brought out and developed by a very able schoolmaster, Adam Hope, whose instruction Carlyle shared with Irving. Adam Hope seems to have been above the average, a teacher of some severity of discipline which was merely an evidence of the superiority of his standards. His tuition laid an indelible impress on the mind of Irving; and Carlyle records of Irving that "through life you could always notice, overhung by such strange draperies, and huge superstructures so foreign to it, something of that old primeval basis of rigorous logic

(1) Irving visited his friend, Rev. Mr. Robert Story of Roseneath, before he went to London. On one of their walks Irving leaped a gate. Story said, "Dear Irving, I did not think you had been so agile." Irving answered, "Once I read you an essay of mine, and you said, 'Dear me, Irving, I did not think you had been so classical'; another time you heard me preach, 'Dear me, Irving, I did not know you had so much imagination'. Now you shall see what great things I will do yet." - Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol. I pages 142, 143.

and clear articulation laid for him in boyhood by old
 (1)
 Adam Hope".

This faculty of Irving for numbers came to the notice of Professor Leslie while Irving was at the University of Edinburgh (1805-1809), and was the reason for his appointment to the newly-established mathematical school at Haddington. Here in spare hours he tutored the young daughter of Doctor Welsh, and the affection for her, here conceived, lasted through many years. (It was Irving who introduced Carlyle to Jane Welsh.)

For seven years Irving continued as schoolmaster, in Haddington and later in Kirkcaldy, and the influence of these years on Irving's mind is seen, I believe, in a certain exactness, even hardness, with which he used the axioms and concepts of theology.

Irving had meanwhile taken work in Divinity Hall at the University, pursuing the reading prescribed during his evening hours, and coming into Edinburgh for examination. This course was finished successfully, but no ecclesiastical appointment was open to him for some time. At last in July 1819, while he was preaching in St. George's for his friend, Dr. Andrew Thomson, he came under the notice of the great Dr. Chalmers of St. John's, Glasgow, and Irving was asked to be his

(1) Carlyle's Reminiscences Vol. II pages 9 and following.

assistant.

Even here Irving does not seem to have stood out in any brilliant light. Although Dr. Thomson had said of that trial sermon in Edinburgh that "it was the production of no ordinary mind", the ordinary hearers in Dr. Chalmers' church saw no great ability in his rather academic productions. Irving was eclipsed by the fame of the great Doctor; on occasions when Irving was to preach, some of the admirers of Chalmers would turn away saying, "It's no himsel'." These years (1819-1822) spent at St. John's show no great progress of ideas. Perhaps his time was too much taken up with the actual work of visitation; what opportunity for personal development he may have had seems to have been spent on the manner rather than the matter of preaching. Christianity, he thought, needed a new presentation rather than a new internal organization or development.

His farewell address at St. John's recorded no great achievement beyond the sentimental regard between pastor and people. In an almost prophetic strain he said, "My theology was never in fault around the fires of the poor, my manners never misinterpreted, my good intentions never mistaken." He was one with the people in loving and being loved, and in this departing speech we catch no note of that positive authority which characterized his later preaching. It is true that he pleaded for those "daring

adventurers in the field of religion who shall eye from the proud eminence of a holy and heavenly mind, all the grievances which religion underlays, and all the obstacles which stay her course, and then descend, with self-denial and the faith of an apostle, to set the battle in array against them." But these bold words stand for an attitude of mind, and have reference to no budding elements of heresy. If Irving had remained within the physical bounds of his mother church, he would probably have always remained perfectly orthodox, a strong minister of established religion. Irving had a strong mind but it was easily influenced by stronger minds about him. When Irving crossed the Tweed on his way to his London church, he had, in mental reaction to that fact, already sowed the seeds of future heresy.

For Irving had received a call to the National Scotch Church, Hatton Garden, London. Apparently the church was in a very poor and discouraged condition at that time, but Irving saw in it the opportunity for independent self-expression which had been denied him in Glasgow. Those long years of pondering on a new and more effective mode of preaching were at last to see their fulfillment. He would appeal to the highest intellects of London with the message of the Gospel! Nothing appeared too hard for these mounting hopes. As someone has said, "He crossed the Tweed with a lighter heart, a more buoy-

ant spirit, and more ecstatic joy than he ever crossed
the ford that led to the home of his father." (1))

Almost immediately he sprang into popularity as a preacher. From this distance of time it is impossible to say exactly what were the elements which made him within the first year the most sought after minister in London. Of course his personal appearance was striking. Dr. Thomas Fleming of Edinburgh in writing a letter of recommendation to Dr. Waugh of London said, "I need not tell you what you will at once perceive that he is a large, raw-boned Scotchman, and that his outward appearance is rather un-
:couth; but I can tell you that his mind is, in proportion, as large as his body; and that whatever is unprepossessing in his appearance will vanish as soon as he is known." (2)
But the unlovely covering to the Scotch mind became part of the fascination to the London public eye. Irving stood over six feet in height, a giant with long black hair and gleaming eye under heavy brows, a figure to be noted in any crowd. And the energy of person was carried into the manner of address, until it became an easy mark for the cartoonist.

The very fact that he criticised his times in no

(1)) Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M. by William Jones, M.A. London 1835.

(2) Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol. I page 132

uncertain terms caught the popular fancy. People seem to delight in sweeping condemnations, and Irving fulfilled their wishes. To him all things were wrong and demanded correction. Washington Wilks wrote in 1854, "Never were the pretensions of rank more ruthlessly spurned - never the vices of the rich more sternly denounced - never the independence of the preacher's office more bravely vindicated - than by Edward Irving, when princes of the blood, and princes of the mart, swelled his audience." (1)

Irving spared none; there were sermons to the rich, sermons to the poor, but in all alike there appeared invective and criticism. "His usual tone was that of remonstrance." (2) The universities of England had the spirit of antiquity, the common people had the spirit of radicalism, and the church the spirit of formality. Individuals were not immune to this attack. Hazlitt in his Table Talk said, "He went out of his way to attack Jeremy Bentham, and the town was up in arms. The thing was new. He thus wiped the stain of musty ignorance and formal bigotry out of his style. Mr. Irving must have something superior in him, to look over the shining, close packed heads of his congregation to have hit at the great Jurisconsult in his study. He next, ere the report of the former blow had subsided, made a lunge at Mr. Brougham, and glanced an

(1) Edward Irving: an Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography by Washington Wilks. London 1854 page 33

(2) Op.cit. page 34

eye at Mr. Canning, mystified Mr. Coleridge, and stultified Lord Liverpool in his place in the gallery. It was rare sport to see him, 'like an eagle in a dovecote, flutter the Volscians in Corioli'. Our spiritual polemic is not contented to defend the citadel of orthodoxy against all impugners, and shut himself up in texts of Scripture, and huge volumes of commentators as an impregnable fortress; he merely makes use of the stronghold of religion as a resting place from which he sallies forth, armed with modern topics, and with penal fire, like Achilles of old rushing from Grecian tents, against the adversaries of God and man.----- Mr. Irving keeps the public in awe by insulting all their favourite idols." ⁽¹⁾ Small wonder it is that for a time society in London flocked to hear this "northern Presbyterian clerical" who had, it was said, ⁽²⁾ "just emerged red hot from the mountains of Caledonia." The applications for seats in Hatton Garden increased in one quarter from fifty to fifteen hundred and it was described as an exploit to get into the Church without ⁽³⁾ loss of life or limb.

Youthful preacher that he was (still under thirty-five years of age) Irving had found that it was a quick road to popularity to wax eloquent over the sins of his time. But it must not be thought that these sermons

(1) Quoted from an article by the Rev. William Watson Andrews, "Edward Irving" in "The New Englander" July and October 1863.

(2) Pamphlet: "Puritanical Treason. The King and Honest John Bull versus Parson Irving".

(3) Irving did not attract Gladstone. Gladstone characterized it as "a scene pregnant with melancholy instruction". See Morley's Life of Gladstone. He speaks of the crush - "the mass of human beings, mercilessly compressed -."

were what we would consider today "popular". They were generally much over an hour long and those that we have cover the great essentials of doctrine, the Fatherhood of God, prayer, the Holy Spirit.

As a more permanent monument to this period of popularity we may fix upon the "Orations" published in 1823. This publication was a young man's attempt to instruct a worldly-wise public, and any lack of success in the venture was due to the fact that the author was not also worldly-wise. Irving would bring people back to a sense for the sacred, even if he must invoke the pains of hell to accomplish that purpose. Time and again the reader is struck by the brilliance of his phrase and epigram, but it is felt too often as a brightness of intellect rather than a depth of moral insight and experience. For instance, he condemned those who "make hell tolerable at the expense of making heaven indifferent", for "it is heaven the Saviour preaches, not hell. Hell is not the alternative to be chosen, and therefore it is made horrible beyond all choice."⁽¹⁾ In general the work gives the effect of antique, artificial conception and arrangement. It is remarkable that the "Orations for the Oracles of God and an Argument for Judgment to Come" passed through three editions in the first six months, for the very

(1) pages 423, 424.

title discourages even a first reading. Naturally the book became the butt of criticism, the gist of which was that the argument was clumsy and ill-arranged. The "Quarterly Review" said, "It is so perplexed with digressions, and encumbered by intermingling the separate heads, sometimes anticipating what is to come, or reverting to what he has exhausted that we find it difficult to discover with what part of the plan we are occupied."⁽¹⁾

In the "Orations" Irving had written, "I wish I had a dwelling-place in every bosom, and could converse with every faculty of man - that I had an ear to hear their murmurings, their sighings, their groanings, and all their separate grief." The fulfillment of such a wish for universal appeal was even at that moment slipping from him. Gradually society left him, and he had to be content with what seems to have been an ordinary large congregation of church goers with a sprinkling of the idly curious. To the end Irving moved amid huge crowds, but they became more and more the church drifters and the ignorant fanatics who are looking for strange doctrine.

Irving's next enthusiasm reacted to deafen this ear of his which would hear the murmurings of the people. The subject of prophecy threw its spell over him. Even in this early period (1822-1825) he was interested in the interpre-

(1) Quoted in the Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M. London 1835

tation of prophecy. In a sermon dating from this time he spoke with absolute authority and assurance of prophecy as "the evidence of all that is past, and the assurance of all that is to come; being at one point of time, the answer of all that went before, and the promise of all that is to come after ---". His contemporaries had also been delving into the subject, and the recent French Revolution had prepared many minds for such forecasts of the future. Irving was first brought into contact with this movement by a Mr. Hatley Frere who interested him in the writing of a Spanish priest, "Rabbi Ben Ezra", on the second coming of the Messiah. Irving proceeded to translate the huge volume, "The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty", from Spanish into English, and published it in 1827. Irving eagerly espoused the premillennial position in all its materialism and vividness. His position is not unusual to this school of prophecy, his expectation being that the present Gentile Church will be dissolved, the Jews will return by the power of God, and Christ will come in flaming fire to rule the world.

For the time this hope became the passion of his life, and he went so far as to return to Edinburgh in 1828 and again in 1829 to instruct his mother church on the second advent. Great crowds heard him morning after morning, even though the hour was six or six-thirty. But

Dr. Chalmers gave a truer judgment of the value of this prophetic effusion: "It is quite woeful. There is power and richness, and gleams of exquisite beauty, but withal, a mysterious and extreme allegorization, which, I am sure, (1) must be pernicious to the general cause."

At this distance of time it appears that the subject had a pernicious effect on the mind of Irving himself. For it is at this period that we note the loss of even the occasional sparkle of the "Orations". His genius was allowed to run rampant over all the extravagances of dates and expectations. Story lamented over Irving, "It is sad to see a lofty mind wasting itself on the vague uncertainties into which modern speculation delights to beat down the inspired utterances of the ancient Hebrew prophets." For that matter Irving never had too close a connection with the realities of life; in 1824 he spoke for the London Missionary Society and recommended to that body the primitive apostolic missionary method "without purse or scrip". Prophecy served to lead him farther from the facts of life into that unreal realm of future possibilities contemplated by the whole circle of Albury prophets. Carlyle wrote of this period when Irving was holding forth on prophecy, "This was, I think, the nadir of my poor Irving: veiled and hooded in these miserable manifold crapes and formulas, so that his brave old self never once (2) looked fairly through."

(1) Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol.II pages 20,21.

(2) Reminiscences-Chapter on "Edward Irving" Vol.II page 186

2. Personality.

The next enthusiasms of Irving require a more detailed consideration. We must pause here to get a more rounded view of the man himself, that we may better appreciate the causes of his departure from contemporary orthodoxy.

As we have noted above, Irving himself had much to do with raising the wave of popular enthusiasm which carried him along with it. He has been caustically criticised from every direction, but no one can say a word against his personal character. To all those who knew him he was a sincere, generous-hearted friend who loved his fellowmen. There seems to have been an openness and humility in his approach to men that disarmed their criticisms and made them his friends. In the eyes of such an one as Dr. Chalmers Irving was one of the "nobles of nature". This was all the more remarkable because the events of his life gave occasion for anything but this generosity and confidence in others. He was thwarted in love, saddened by the loss of children, deserted by the closest friends; yet nowhere do we catch the note of bitterness.

The charge of insincerity has an apparent foundation in the stilted, unnatural style of writing and argumentation. But no charge could be so entirely disproved by the judgment of those who knew him best. Carlyle, the greatest foe of shams, gives the best testimony to the perfect sincerity

of Irving: "Though he cannot speak or act one hour without
 cant, he really means to be sincere."⁽¹⁾ "But, above all,
 be what he might, to be a reality was indispensable for him,"
 "the Messenger of Truth in the Age of Shams".⁽²⁾ It may be
 that in some things Irving deceived himself, but we cannot
 charge him with consciously feigning beliefs which he did
 not hold. This sure foundation of sincerity gives a basis
 from which we can calmly examine his ideas. Otherwise we
 must confess ourselves at loss even on the threshold of
 such an inquiry. Charles Lamb in a jocular mood wrote to
 a friend concerning Irving, "Can this man be a quack?" No
 one who knew him could seriously put such a question.

We must admit that Irving appears too self-conscious
 at times. He felt that many eyes were upon him, he was
 all too keenly aware of the accusations made against him,
 and much of his later writing was marred by complaint of
 the recriminations of his opponents. He was all too quick
 to justify himself in the eyes of the world, to him a
 hostile world. And yet, self-conscious as he was in regard
 to his position in the world, he was not fully conscious
 of the processes of his own mind (as none of us are). He
 himself could not have told us how he arrived at any certain
idea or belief.

(1) Carlyle's letter to Jane Welsh "Carlyle till
 Marriage" - D.A. Wilson

(2) Fraser's Magazine Jan. 1835 -

Perhaps this was due to the very energy of his personality. Irving's was an active genius, and the depth of character was lost in the swiftness of action. Carlyle spoke of "a giant force of activity" in him which gave him a consciousness of powers within and an unshakeable confidence in the service which he was to render the world. It is not to be wondered that Irving readily joined in controversy. As he said of his opponent, "A Scotchman's hand is always one half too near his weapon."⁽¹⁾ Irving was no exception, and he indulged in controversy rather indiscriminately and with little check upon the sharpness of his words.

Irving's was an essentially simple character. He had one great passion, the work of Christ, and he could never forget it. He was always the minister of the Gospel. He had likewise one besetting sin, if such it may be called, the vanity of being loved. He admitted it in his farewell sermon in St. John's when, after describing the welcome he had received in the homes of the poor, he said, "Of this popularity I am covetous." But there was nothing shameful or base in it: he had a high esteem for and a firm trust in his fellows and he longed for a like return. Never did Irving appeal purposely and directly to the sensational in order to gain popularity. Carlyle inferred

(1) Irving's pamphlet, "Christ's Holiness in Flesh" 1831 pages xv, xvi.

that this was 'the case, and that Irving's downfall, as he regarded it, was due to his vanity in being loved, to the desertion of society, and the consequent wild endeavors to regain it. He laid it all to London "Pulpit Popularity; the smoke of that foul witch's caldron; - there never was anything else to blame!" Carlyle of course loved the extreme and striking statement, and the other facts in Irving's life do not bear out this conclusion.

Irving's character was sound. "Whatever errors he may have run into," said a contemporary, "were errors of the head, not of the heart."⁽¹⁾ And that simple, generous personality was called upon to bear such testing as few have experienced. Others around him were convicted of fraud, but his character remained unscathed.

3. Mental Characteristics.

Irving's mind is indeed a riddle. He himself could not have told how it functioned, and it was the despair of his friends. Unaccountable reasons often controlled its decisions. And yet in many ways Irving had a brilliant mind, and it played a most important part in his religious life which he sought to keep consistently on the intellectual level. All

(1) Anonymous periodical quoted in "Biographical Sketch" by William Jones.

that can be done in this brief survey is to point out some of its most apparent characteristics.

There was about it a certain naiveness and easy credulity. In his simple-hearted generosity Irving believed on the most insufficient testimony. It was no wrench of mental processes for him to vouch for the reality of a faith cure, and the wildest tales found in him a credulous listener. ⁽¹⁾ This naiveness made it difficult for him to understand the unbelief in those around him. "I am broken in my heart daily with your ⁽²⁾ slowness of faith!" he wrote to a friend.

The reverse side of this credulity was an increasing lack of critical judgment. In fact his declining course can be measured by the lessening influence of anything that smacked of a critical faculty. He lacked common sense. He was not critical of the products of his own mind, and sometimes they lacked that vital connection with things as they are. The Anniversary Sermon which Irving preached for the London Missionary Society was a case in point. To think of proposing the apostolic method of missionary work as the substitute for the organized labors of a great missionary society - yet Irving believed in just that proposal! Nor was he critical of ideas as they

(1) He believed Henry Drummond's news of the discovery of the lost tribes of Israel in Asia.

(2) Letter to Allan Ker - April 30, 1833 in Mrs. Oliphant's "Life" Vol. II pages 332-335

came to him from without. He simply accepted them at their face value. This deficiency in Irving's mental equipment was fostered by, if it did not have its origin in, the very strength of his religious life. In the early years one catches now and then a critical note. But as his religious labors more and more engrossed his mind, he became, in his own words, "too much over-awed to think". He had criticised others for this in the "Orations". He fell into the trap himself. Religion tended to displace reason and knowledge. (He would away with all independent knowledge such as was embodied in the growing science of his day.)

But another explanation for his wonderful credulity and astounding lack of critical judgment may be found in his great and sustained imagination. "He has imagination, but little judgment," said a reviewer of his day,⁽¹⁾ and the former worked to eliminate the latter. The "Orations" are full of imaginative figures, some of them ludicrously mixed.⁽²⁾ The later work does not show the same figurative style, but the influence of this "luxuriant" imagination is still apparent in the development of any subject. That development is rather a tangled maze of crossing

(1) "Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A. a Cento of Criticism" London 1823

(2) In the "Orations" Irving spoke of "noiseless nature putting forth her buds, and drinking the milk of her existence from the distant sun".

connections. His expansive mind will not let go what has already been said, and must anticipate what remains to be said. Certainly we find this quality in his printed works. His extempore sermons must have also been filled with figures, for the Dumfries Courier, June 1829, made the following comment upon some of them: "They are less remarkable for logical arrangement, than for the excursive flights of a rich and ingenious imagination." The sermons that we have are not conspicuous for a grand, stately movement of developing thought, and his eloquence must have been overwhelming rather than persuasive.

As Mrs. Oliphant observed, Irving carried every subject "out of the everyday atmosphere into a world of thought and ideal truth, where practicabilities, much more expediencies, did not enter."⁽¹⁾ This judgment would give some explanation of the fascination which prophecy had for Irving. Prophecy laid slight restraints upon his imaginative faculty, and he could soar far into the realms of fancy. The symbolism was striking, the figures realistic; and he entered with all the energy of his nature into the "uncertainties" of prophetic interpretation.

His was a sustained imagination. It exerted a constant, if unconscious, influence. It is no unfounded

(1) Mrs. Oliphant's "Life" Vol. I page 224.

observation to say that he acted a part. He himself would have denied indignantly any such charge. But his actions are those of a man under the stimulus of a great imagination. Early in his ministry he seems to have considered himself as an apostle of antique type, and even in Glasgow days we read of his apostolic benediction, "Peace be to this house." At one time he undertook an apostolic journey over the moors of Scotland to his Annan home. In the first years in London John the Baptist became his hero, and we hear him say, "It is my intention to dilate upon the history of God's judgments in the hearing of this city, after the manner of an ancient prophet, and with none of the soft lullabies of modern speculation, that the city may be warned ----." And as a modern John the Baptist he proceeded to lay bare the sins of his time. Even in his appearance before the London Presbytery 1832 he came in the role of the Herald of Christ.

Irving's rich imagination may account for what appears at first sight to be an opposite characteristic. The products of his mind have a certain mechanical stamp upon them. The same ideas appear time and time again, and generally in a hard-and-fast, materialistic mold. His spiritual ideas were all cast along the lines of material realities. Uncritical as he was, he handled his ideas as units, and in his treatment they acquired no rich aroma of spiritual feeling. In no sense can we

think of him as belonging to the romantic school of his time in the use of an enriching, discerning imagination. We may apply the adjective, expansive, rather than imaginative to his mind (or imaginative only in a limited sense). Instead of being an elastic mind it was of an unbending temper, and was not radically changed by any controversy into which he entered. Back and forth it moved, like a pendulum, over any subject under consideration, making, quite like the same pendulum, small progress. It would not be unfair to say that this mental quality was caused, or at least revealed, by his mathematical studies which of course treated things in a mechanical, unit fashion.

In modern terms we would say that Irving lacked a sense of humor. There was no easy elasticity about him that would put all things in their place. Carlyle may describe his enjoyment of the ludicrous in those Kirkcaldy days, but certain it is that in London we find little sense of proportion in his action and words. He took himself too seriously, and never could forget that he was a minister of the Gospel. In accord with this lack of a sense of humor we may note the strong stamp of conservatism that characterized his later life. It was difficult for him to see the new liberal movements in their true proportion. In this respect he seems to have undergone a decided change. Dr. Welsh of Haddington in speaking of

Irving said, "This youth will scrape a hole in
 everything he is called upon to believe."⁽¹⁾ But
 writing shortly after Irving's marriage(1823)
 Carlyle described him as "putting willfully on
 the fetters of a thousand prejudices",⁽²⁾ and
 henceforth Irving appeared, instead of the
 champion of republican and Cameronian heroes, as
 the upholder of church-and-king doctrines, the
 opponent of the Toleration Act, the hater of the
 very word "liberal".⁽³⁾ Even in his heresy Irving
 thought that he was recalling the Church to her
 original belief, and he cited the evidence of the
 Fathers to prove it. His reading tended to draw
 him back to things as they had been. From Hooker
 he took a sixteenth century idea of the church.
 In Bishop Overall's "Convocation Book" he found
 a sixteenth century confirmation of his maxim that
 all power is given of God, and subjects do not
 have the right of resistance. Popular government
 to his mind was based on radicalism and the dis-
 :solution of all government. Such influences from
 the past acted, as we shall see later, in conjunction

(1) Mrs.Oliphant's "Life" Vol.I page 41

(2) "Carlyle till Marriage" - D.A.Wilson page 306

(3) "Biographical Sketch" - Washington Wilks page 188

with the temper of his religion, to overwhelm all liberal sentiments and to give almost a mediaeval bias to all his ideas.

When we add an extreme quality of mind to all that has been said, the reader may well expect to find a certain spirit of fanaticism. "The natural endowments of mind and body," observed Fraser's Magazine a month after his death, "were in Edward Irving on a gigantic scale." His energy of mind was astonishing, turning out volume after volume with wonderful rapidity. And the same strength of mind carried him to the extreme position on any subject. He would take up an idea, and then force it to "go on all fours", putting it in the first and foremost position in all that he uttered, until the next great idea supplanted it. He would over-state his own position and thus bring upon himself endless criticism, and upon the reader the task of unravelling the truth from the wild statement. To take the middle course was impossible for a man of such strong uncritical temper.

But in spite of the foregoing description Irving's mind must remain a mystery. Great ability was there without doubt. His friends felt that he might have distinguished himself in so many fields

as a leader of men. To us who look back upon him over a century of time his mind appears untrained and but poorly disciplined.

4. Influences from without.

Irving's work is like a luxuriant growth with roots in the past. He did not stand alone and independent, but he frankly confessed, "Hooker and Taylor and Baxter, in theology; Bacon and Newton and Locke, in philosophy, have been my companions, as Shakespeare, and Spenser, and Milton, have been in poetry."⁽¹⁾ Of course it is impossible to trace definitely the influence of each of these worthies in the work of Irving, but all together they form a formidable background of older learning. It is a question whether there is any pure philosophy in the pages of Irving. As far as Locke was concerned, Irving owned to having rejected his philosophy of democracy. The influence of Milton was more marked, and was not confined to the bounds of pure literature. In University days Irving enjoyed reading "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained", and his sermons give us evidence that he maintained his acquaintance with these epics of redemption. The great influence of Milton over Irving was in the realm of ideas: Irving's Satan as a fallen angel with his accompanying hosts is more Miltonic than Biblical,
 (1) Preface to the third edition of the "Orations".

and redemption is altogether on the lines of poetic imagery with definite features, rather than in the form of a great moral and spiritual reality. It is also worthy of more than a passing note that Milton's idea of redemption stops short with the temptation experience of Christ, and Irving's in some respects also does not go beyond that point. Milton's influence over Irving has never been truly appraised, but we can see that it played a fundamental part in shaping the elements of his theology and his general attitude toward spiritual realities.

The effect of Hooker's influence has been more openly acknowledged. Fraser's Magazine (January 1835) says, "The circumstance of his early life which most decidedly gave the peculiar tone to his character, and most contributed to draw forth its strength, was meeting with Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, when a boy, at a farm-house near his father's." To Hooker is to be attributed "that taste for profound theology, that reverence for establishments, and that relish for the phrase of olden time, which some attributed to affectation of singularity." Irving's style of positive and negative assertions certainly bears a similarity to

that of the "Ecclesiastical Polity". Many of his ideas are from Hooker: conception of the sacraments, the impersonality of Christ's human nature, the mortality of Christ's body, and others that will be noted in the course of this discussion. It may be truly said that Irving owed much of his peculiarity, personal and professional, to his close contact with these figures that had gone before. Would that he had had critical judgment sufficient to choose the enduring elements from the past and had used them in a more modern setting!

From what has been said, it may be wondered whether Irving is worthy of study. Has he fallen properly into oblivion? He attracts and repels in quick succession. He did much that was foolish and impractical, but, strange to say, we find among his close friends some of the outstanding men of his time, Dr. Chalmers in the field of practical Christian sociology, Thomas Carlyle in the field of literature, and Coleridge in the realm of philosophy, not to speak of Campbell of Row, the prophet of a new Christian soteriology. If these men found somewhat in Irving to inspire their love and respect, surely he is worthy of our acquaintance. Their influence upon him however was far from uniform. In proportion to the greatness of his friends Irving profitted very little.

Irving was under Dr. Chalmers as assistant for a number of years, but we can detect no great influence from this contact. There was great mutual respect, but neither understood the other. Irving does not seem to have entered with any enthusiasm into the schemes of Chalmers for poor relief, and Chalmers in turn always stood aloof from Irving with a strange wonder and foreboding of what would come forth next from him. In fact they stood at opposite poles of temper from each other: Chalmers was of this world to make it better, while Irving condemned this world and prayed for divine intervention. The former was the patient practical Christian and the latter was the impractical, impatient, visionary mystic.

Thomas Carlyle had little more influence and for the same reason. Irving and Carlyle had much in common in those Kirkcaldy days when they were masters of rival schools. Carlyle called Irving "the faithful elder brother"⁽¹⁾ of those early years, and the tide of influence then seems to have been toward Carlyle, the younger of the two by several years. In those days Irving was the brilliant figure and Carlyle followed. Irving gave to Carlyle a sense of confidence in his own powers, urged him to write, secured for him the tutorship with the Bullers. But even at that time the breach between them was widening, and by the time

(1) Carlyle's "Reminiscences" Vol. II page 98

Carlyle had attained the position and experience to be able to help Irving in a positive way, Irving had insulated himself in what Carlyle considered religious cant, and neither could enjoy the genius of the other. Too late Irving realized his mistake, and at the close of life he said, "I should have kept Thomas Carlyle closer to me: his counsel, blame or praise, was always faithful; and few have such eyes." ⁽¹⁾ In a deeper sense the difference between them lay in just that: Carlyle had critical discerning eyes which could distinguish pure moral quality from that which was mere cloak or covering, while Irving had the eyes of quick vision, comprehending but not critical. The comparison of minds may be further illustrated by an incident which occurred just before Irving took up his work in St. John's, Glasgow. Irving set out from Annan for Glasgow, Carlyle going with him as far as the hill-top overlooking the neighborhood of Moffat. There they paused to part. As they stood watching the shadows of the flying clouds on the landscape, Carlyle said, "Life, life!" Irving only squeezed his arm - "Goodbye! Goodbye!" and strode swiftly away toward Moffat and Glasgow. ⁽²⁾ So it was! Irving could not wait to ponder the realities of life, but must hurry away

(1) Carlyle's "Reminiscences" Vol. II page 101

(2) D.A. Wilson - "Carlyle till Marriage"

to take his place among the crowd. Carlyle took longer to achieve success, but he won a more lasting place. Irving had not time to think deeply, and perhaps his very brilliance led him into habits of shallow thinking. As Carlyle observed, "Speculation (1) was accident, not nature" with Irving.

Our assurance of Irving's worth is further strengthened by his friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Highgate. Here of course Irving was the humble disciple. Basil Montagu had introduced him to the philosopher in the early London days, and their acquaintance immediately proved to be one of kindred spirits. Coleridge had much to say and the eager mind of Irving drank it in greedily. Irving often compared himself to a ship drifting toward a sandbank when Coleridge took him in tow and launched him into deep waters again. And Coleridge was not slow to express himself in appreciation of the Caledonian preacher: in the "Aids to Reflection" published at this time he characterized Irving as "a mighty wrestler in the cause of spiritual religion, and gospel morality, in whom, more than in any other contemporary, I seem to see the spirit of Luther (2) revived."

(1) Fraser's Magazine, January 1835. Carlyle stayed by Irving to the end, always seeking to keep him on the rational level. When news came of Irving's death, Carlyle broke forth with one of his grandest utterances. There was a dramatic, spectacular quality about the life of Irving which would inspire his best genius.

(2) Page 373

But in spite of this friendly spirit between them subsequent events showed that there was a fundamental breach between them which effectually prevented much interchange of power. Irving took up prophetic interpretation, and continued in it despite Coleridge's protest. Coleridge tried to keep with him as far as possible and wrote in the margin of "Ben Ezra", "At all events, Daniel and the Apocalypse shall not part us."⁽¹⁾ Irving was unmoved by Coleridge's objections and kept away from Highgate, preaching that the time for signs and wonders had come. To the calm philosopher this position was absurd, and he wrote to Crabb Robinson, June 18, 1828, "He is a good man, but his brain has been turned by the shoutings of the mob. I think him mad, literally mad."

In 1824 Irving had dedicated his London Missionary Society address to Coleridge and had said to him, "You have been more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine, to my spiritual understanding of the word of God, and to my right conception of the Christian church, than any or all the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation." Doubtless this influence was considerable for a few years - too basic perhaps to be easily recognized. After contact with Coleridge

(1) Alois Brandl - "Samuel Taylor Coleridge" London 1887 page 375

Irving seems to have spoken on more fundamental subjects, writing learnedly of reason and the inward faculty, introducing a moral tone to his ideas of sin and redemption which sounds Kantian.

But the separation was inevitable, for they had come to their religious ideas from opposite angles. Coleridge had gone through a period of unitarian belief, then skepticism, to a later time of firm confidence in the truths of religion based on philosophy. Irving, on the other hand, never had a period of serious doubt, and the truths of the Gospel had always burned for him with undimmed light. Irving therefore did not see the need of philosophy and he reacted against such an approach to religion. "The future state of the philosopher", he wrote in a sermon, "is of a piece with the religion of the philosopher - an abstraction and a refinement of the sublimed spirit." Religion was supreme, all in all to Irving, and every other intellectual pursuit must acknowledge its sway. When Irving wrote in "Ben Ezra", "Reason is set at nought, and her inability demonstrated to attain unto any part of the mystery of Divine Love", Coleridge wrote in the margin with some heat, "This is the sort of sentence of too frequent recurrence in this discourse, to which I so impatiently object." Some one has said that the ghost of Kant stood between Coleridge and Irving. To

the latter, philosophy as the handmaid of religion was of doubtful service, for the center of all things is not man's reason but God revealed. On the other hand, Coleridge's position is apparent in an observation in the "Aids to Reflection": "He who begins by loving Christianity better than truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or Church better than Christianity, and end by loving himself better than all."

Irving profited little by his best friends. His mind was a whirlwind so bent on its own course as to be indifferent to the currents of influence from others. It caught up here and there indiscriminately a truth from other minds and then by the very vigor of its movement that truth was raised on high for all to see. The course of his mind was erratic, and the very circumstances in which it was placed seemed to augur some disaster.

Irving's higher schooling had done little to bring his mind into the ordinary human channels of movement. He was almost a self-schooled minister. After his university years he spent only one term in Divinity Hall. He pursued what Mrs. Oliphant has so well described as "that singular, grave pretence of theological education which is called 'partial' study in the Divinity Hall".⁽¹⁾ He therefore studied alone, and missed that discipline of mind which can

(1) Mrs. Oliphant's "Life" Vol. I page 49

come only in the free interchange of ideas in the classroom. His reading was much from the past and tended to cut him off from contemporary religious movements. To this circumstance of solitary education may be attributed his supreme confidence and his lack of critical temper.

Add to this circumstance the subsequent ecclesiastical freedom of London, and you see that he was treading on dangerous ground. Before his career in the Church was fairly started he left Scotland where the Church was dominant and went to London where the Scotch Church stood almost alone. From London he wrote to his friend, Graham, "Here there are no limitations to my mind's highest powers",⁽¹⁾ and we may add, no restraints to keep it in bounds. He had thus lost the great religious background of support and was free to play an independent part in the sphere of religious ideas. This was his opportunity and also his danger! He had escaped from theological Scotland which "above all things, is dubious and jealous of originality."⁽²⁾ But for one who was over-bold the lack of restraint was the possible occasion of wildness of doctrine. It was a favorite word of his in the early years that

(1) Mrs. Oliphant's "Life" Vol. I page 152

(2) Carlyle's "Reminiscences" Vol. II page 98

while others were content to sail from port to port close to the shore, he intended to sail courageously out into the great ocean of truth.

As we look back upon his life, the dramatic preparation for his downfall seems complete when we consider the support which London popularity gave to this free, bold and undisciplined genius. The rise from obscurity to popularity was too sudden! It did not make him vain or jealous of retaining the popular regard, as some have said. But it gave too sure a support, and in this sense only was Carlyle right in blaming London pulpit popularity. Consciously Irving refused to consider public opinion: "I can say with a safe conscience, that to this hour it never cost me a thought to gain it, nor to keep it, nor to lose it. I count it so volatile and so wicked, that, upon the whole, I (1) would rather have it against me than with me."

But even so, unknown to himself, that public opinion, first in the days when all were flocking to him, and later when the press and others criticised him but his own huge flock stood by him, was giving him an unwearied support. So we hear him speak with an ipse dixit which at one and the same time drew people

(1) Irving's "The Last Days" July 1828 - Dedication to his people.

(1)
to him and propelled him on to possible heresy.

These prognostications of danger are not premature in the development of this study of Edward Irving. His contemporaries felt that his high position might lay him open to a fall.

Dr. Chalmers wrote to his wife after the service in which he had introduced Irving to his flock,

"I hope that he will not hurt his usefulness by any kind of eccentricity or imprudence."⁽²⁾ A

quarter of a century after Irving's death Carlyle made a similar observation: "On the whole one could gather too clearly that Irving's course was beset with pitfalls, barking dogs, and dangers and difficulties unwarned of; and that, for one who took so little counsel with prudence, he perhaps carried his head too high."⁽³⁾

(1) In the exposition October 21, 1852 Irving made the following statement: "The Lord setteth ministers in the church, not to speak their own mind, but the mind of God -----; look upon me as a minister of Christ, set in his church to teach his people the way of righteousness."

(2) Mrs. Oliphant's "Life" Vol. I page 156

(3) Carlyle's "Reminiscences" Vol. II page 183

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Chapter II.

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Chapter II.

General Background of Theology

Our special concern in the development of this thesis is Irving's conviction concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. A preliminary review of the religious setting of that Christology must, however, be taken in order that we may have a full understanding of the basis of such original elements as may appear.

Irving's religious views appear at first sight to be on a thoroughly intellectual foundation. His chief concern seems to have been religious ideas, and his pulpit duties made necessary a clear, if wordy, setting forth of the truths and objective ideas of religion. But numerous hints in his writing and his life lead us to look for a personal side of his religious life of a more mystical nature. A journal which he wrote to his wife during a part of one year reveals this private phase of his faith. It is in this "behind-the-scenes" religion that we may hope to find some reason for peculiarities of the faith of this man who spent so much of his life in the lime-light of public opinion.

1. Personal Religion.

The record of the activities of Irving indicates that he was a profoundly religious man. His religion

was his life, and even though it may have been limited in the range of its experience, it was all-absorbing. He lived his own maxim that religion is a thing of the whole life; after his death his friends could say, "In God he lived, and moved, and had his being; no act was done but in prayer; every blessing was received with thanksgiving to God; every friend was dismissed with a parting benediction."⁽¹⁾ As he looked outward upon the world his religious passion would constrain him to look constantly for spiritual truth.⁽²⁾ As he looked inward upon himself, nothing there could justify its place which did not serve the immediate purposes of religion; he even wished he were too stupid to understand a joke if thereby he could cultivate honesty and simplicity of soul. His complete absorption in religious thoughts gave a rather morbid and one-sided development to his religious world of ideas, and it lacked the well-rounded wholeness of natural development.

His religious experience seems to have been on the pattern of John the Baptist rather than^{on} that of a disciple of Christ. While he lived and dwelt in the presence of God, "conscious of bearing about the hand of the Lord", and could say with his dying breath, "If I die, I die unto the Lord", his Lord was a moral rather than

(1) Fraser's Magazine January 1835

(2) "Dialogues on Prophecy" (The Albury Conversations) Vol. II page 273.

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(1) Fraser's Magazine January 1835

(2) "Dialogues on Prophecy" (The Albury Conversations) Vol. II page 273.

a fatherly Deity, and his relationship to Him was devoid of some of the richer qualities of love and trust. He seems to have felt the judging eyes of God upon him, for much of the strength of his spiritual life was spent in a morbid searching for sin in his own heart. His journal and letters to his wife mention temptations from Satan on the most trivial grounds, such as mourning for his dead child and counting the days till his wife's return to him. He was very sensitive to the instinctive physical impulses within, for he cried out in one letter, "Oh, that the Lord would make me a Nazarite indeed to the lusts of the flesh!" Because he felt the burden of sin so heavily, he developed a profound sense of his own unworthiness. He called himself an "unworthy sinner", a "headstrong rebel," dragged by God out of a horrible pit. It amounted to an unhealthy self-depreciation when he wrote, "I am nothing but a broken reed. I desire to be still viler in my sight. I am His worthless instrument, whom He will use for His own glory, either in saving me or in not saving me: and so that His glory is promoted I desire to be satisfied. Oft I have the feeling of the Apostle - lest I also be a castaway."⁽¹⁾ This sense of sin and unworthiness had, as we may see later, a direct bearing on his heresy.

(1) Letter to his wife, May 17, 1828, from Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol. II page 15.

In conjunction with such a low opinion of self we very naturally find a certain mystical tendency. To demonstrate the presence of this element is the more difficult because Irving ostensibly would have nothing to do with mysticism. He rejected mysticism as worship without an object of imitation, and even in his Christology his abhorrence of the mystical led him to emphasize the distinctness of the persons in Jesus, although he admitted that the union was closer than any visible union. It is therefore quite clear that his was not a thorough-going mysticism. What does appear has been intellectualized as far as possible.

A negative indication of such mystical tendencies is found in his condemnation of prudence and reason. "Faith and prudence," he declared in the preface to his London Missionary Society Oration, "are opposite poles of the soul, the one attracting to it all things spiritual and divine, the other all things sensual and earthy." And in "Ben Ezra" Irving declared, "Reason is set at nought, and her inability demonstrated to attain unto any part of the mystery of Divine Love." Faith to him was not mere belief in the Biblical record, but approached real union. In his unworthiness he would surrender himself to the Holy Spirit, losing his "vile" self in the Divine. Such was the expressed desire of his soul, but we cannot tell whether in his private devotional life it went any farther

than words.

It may be truly said that Irving's mysticism, if such we may call it, was subordinate to his moral fervor. He sought the presence of Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit to the end that he might overcome his own sins. In 1825 he wrote to his wife as follows:

"It is not reasoning, or knowledge, or admonition, or council, or watchfulness, or any other form of spiritual carefulness and ability, but His own presence - His own Spirit, quick and lively, which maketh us tender, ready, discerning, in the ways of righteousness and iniquity.-- Mistrust reasonings, mistrust examples, mistrust prudential views, mistrust motives, and seek for an abiding, a constant spirit of holiness, which shall breathe of God, and feel of God, and watch in God, and care in God, and in all things reveal God to be with us and in us."

(1)

Irving's mystical temper rose but little higher than the first step in the scala perfectionis - the purgative life.

(2)

It is worthy of note that Irving, with all his sense of sin, never seems to have had any clouds of doubt on his spiritual horizon. The light of his spiritual fervor blazed forth steadily with never a suggestion of a question. This fact made it difficult for Irving to sympathize with the spiritual darkness of such an one as Carlyle. Neither do we find any trace of an experience of conversion. This lack was perfectly natural to one who had grown up in the bosom of the church, but it narrowed his ideas of the religious life and robbed him of any understanding of the

(1) Its source may possibly be found to a certain extent in the mysticism of the Scottish Confession which Irving greatly preferred to the Westminster Confession.

(2) "Christian Mysticism" - W.R. Inge Chapter I.

experience of conversion. Such "sick-room and hospital nonsense", as he called it, was beside the point in the greater work of self-purification. He objected to such experiences on two grounds, or rather one in two aspects: they "subject the spirit to the sensible", hanging "all religious trust on a bodily feeling", and therefore they deny the reality of God's gifts until we experience them in ourselves. He held that such a procedure was to make religion subjective, a thing of moods and not a wonderful reality in God apart from man. With his spiritual sensitiveness, his self-depreciation and of course his Calvinistic background he very naturally laid chief emphasis on the divine side of religion. In other words, baptism or receiving the Spirit, and not conversion, was to him the beginning of the Christian life.

2. Religious Ideas.

From what has been said concerning the mind of Irving we must not expect to find perfect consistency or order in this field of religious ideas. If he was consistent in his theological thinking, it came more from the definiteness and system in the general theology of his day.

Some development and progress in these ideas that constituted the background of his theology can be traced even in the few years of his ministry. It is however impossible to judge as to his earliest views, for he burned his first sermons before he went to Glasgow. What progress he did make was largely in reaction to some of the great



religious movements of his time.

Among the poorer classes of England Methodism was very popular. Its emphasis on the experience of the spiritual realities was of course in direct opposition to Irving's ideas of religion, and he criticised it severely. At the opposite extreme from this experiential type of religion was Unitarianism, a religious movement which took a new lease on life at about the period of Irving's stay in London. It was probably brought into his horizon by Coleridge who had previously upheld its position. Its denial of Christ's deity called for an explanation of that cardinal truth on grounds as sane as those of the denial. Irving undertook to give this rational explanation of the person and atoning work of Christ. A third movement within the church, Evangelicalism, seems to have been representative of a type of religious thought which persists to the present day. It was a pious, if sentimental, attitude toward Christianity, laying greater stress on orthodoxy than on criticism, a static Protestantism which tended to accept the symbols of religion for the facts. Irving determined to replace such a "water-color, gaudy sketch of the person of Christ"⁽¹⁾ with a Christ of flesh and blood, substituting for their "flattering encomium of the beauty of religion" a sterner religion of holiness and duty.

The weapons with which Irving would combat these tendencies were all, he thought, ancient and tried. He

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol.II Page 482

would put on the whole armour of Calvinism which, he firmly believed, was true to things apostolic. To his mind this was a "bullet-proof" theology. He admitted no loop-holes anywhere; had he seen any flaws, he would have filled the gaps with perfect ease. It is not too much to say that he took the complete theological system as it was handed down to him. He went the whole distance with Calvinism, even the second mile, for his theological background shows affinities, not so much with the adapted Calvinism of his own time, as with the Calvinism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Irving's friend, the Reverend Edward Thomas Vaughan of Leicester, who held the heresy concerning Christ's human nature with Irving if not before him, published a pamphlet⁽¹⁾ defending Calvinism in which he yielded "nothing which would even pluck a hair from Calvin's head". Irving's position was practically the same and he thought of his peculiar doctrines as supplementary to the Calvinistic system.

We may therefore expect to find the greatest emphasis laid on the divine element in religion. God is all and in all. He is the Sovereign and all events happen as results of his everlasting purpose and decree. Theoretically Irving had no confidence in man; even faith must be the gift of God.. Despairing of progress by human instruments Irving found millenialism exactly suited to his mind. God

(1)The Calvinistic Clergy Defended and the Doctrine of Calvin Maintained in a Letter to the Rev.Beresford, A.M. Rector of Kibworth - by Edward Thomas Vaughan - London 1818

must come to redeem his world from this evil generation. Man can almost sit back and watch the drama of salvation, a spectator rather than an actor. The plan of redemption is de-moralized; even the moral qualities in Christ and in men are gifts divine, and men have but a small part even in sanctification.

The second quality of Irving's theological system follows hard upon the first: just as the practical aspects of theology, or the plan of salvation are largely independent of the generic Man, so the theological scheme and its constituent elements are held stiffly aloof from the heart of the theologian. In its practical use the system appears mechanical. The reader feels that it has lost its vital meaning just because it is so perfect and settled and definite. It may be too much to expect this busy theologian-preacher to win every point for us out of the strenuous experience of his own thinking. But the absence of this "struggle" element leaves the great ideas of religion barren and unconvincing.

In this theological frame-work the axioms of religion are the pivotal points. Irving did not think to question their validity or to reconstruct them out of his own thinking, for to him they were immovable axioms. That God was a Trinity of Persons was of course an axiom; instead of attempting a richer restatement of this ancient truth, Irving went on to build upon it out of the logic of the

original hypothesis, and he could predicate what each Person of the Trinity did in any divine action. Using the axiom that God is impassible in the same hard and fixed manner he attributed the suffering of Christ to his human nature alone. And because the Holy Ghost is the only member of the Trinity who can act visibly, he limited sanctification to the working of the Holy Ghost.

But in making this characterization of Irving's theology we are without doubt passing judgment on much of the theological thinking of his time. He was to a large extent the child of his time, and that time was not always critical of its religious ideas. Certainly we can attribute the third outstanding quality of Irving's theology to this wider circle: the whole system is related to the first man, Adam. Adam controls as the type, even of Christ himself, and redemption is negative, a restoration of what was lost at the fall. Religion is backward looking to the golden age behind, and happy were man today if he enjoyed the bliss of the Garden of Eden.

In illustration of the above characteristics we will refer briefly to some of the controlling ideas in Irving's theology. Their full effect will be seen in the later chapters dealing with the heresy.

a. The Bible. Ostensibly the Bible occupies the first place as the foundation of Irving's system. A sermon in early Edinburgh days delivered for Doctor Ritchie, Professor

of Divinity, showed a zeal for the supreme and infallible standard of Scripture.⁽¹⁾ His first publication, "For the Oracles of God", was a direct, if rather academic, appeal for the place of the Bible in the life of the people. The Bible was a sufficient revelation and should pervade the whole life of a man. His extreme position here stated,⁽²⁾ "Obey the Scriptures or you perish", would leave small doubt in our minds as to the primacy of the Scriptural Record in human life.

This extreme position is somewhat undermined when the ability of the human faculties to understand that Record is considered. Irving mistrusted the capacity of even the best human intellect to fathom the depths of truth contained in the Bible and he sought the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. As time went on, Irving went even farther in this direction until in 1828 he practically denied the Protestant principle of private interpretation, calling it the "fertile source of sectarianism".⁽³⁾ He wrote, "This notion, of every man examining every matter for himself, is a poor, ignorant, self-conceited vagary ----." He seems to have developed a strange abhorrence of those he called "Bible Christians" with their "texts for every day in the year" and their devotion

(1) Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol.I Page 83

(2) "For the Oracles of God, Four Orations" - Page 63

(3) For the following quotations see "Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses" Vol.II Pages 415, 443, 483, 438, 436

to the Book. In the last analysis of Irving's position the Scriptures are to be set down as subordinate to the accepted interpretation: "Doubt every interpretation which is original or novel". "The true wisdom is to study the Scriptures with a careful respect and great reverence for the one faith which all sound divines and orthodox churches have maintained." (The question rises in our minds, "Is orthodoxy then superior to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit?")

In practical use the Bible was for Irving confirmatory rather than normative to faith. It became a collection of proof-texts to be used in support of any argument, regardless of the original setting. For to Irving the Bible was a unity of truth, the New Testament fulfilling the Old explicitly and the Old Testament containing the New implicitly. At one time Irving took Bishop Horne to task for attributing certain expressions in the Psalms to Christ, but he himself fell into exactly the same fault later as we shall see. The Scriptures being such a unity, the bonds of connection run through every part and "all of God's word is at one and the same time prophetic and historical".⁽¹⁾ Therefore "the first promise in Eden contains in itself the whole of the revelation and prophecy of God in an embryo state." Typology fits in with such a view of Scripture, and typology, we find, reigned supreme in Irving's interpretation with results such as can be readily imagined. In an exposition of I Samuel IX 1-11

(1) For the following quotations see "Ben Ezra" - Introduction by Irving pages 67, 69

he said, "This is not only historical truth but it contains a beautiful figure of the mystery of God. - - Now, Saul representeth the mighty power that is now, in a state of infancy, in the world. David is the man-child that will rule the nations, and break them in pieces, as with a rod of iron; Christ in his church, making demonstration of his power upon his and her enemies; and then cometh Solomon, the Prince of Peace (Jesus Christ)." In this method of interpretation Irving was but the child of a time that made all sacred history prophecy, even the Book of Ruth.⁽¹⁾ But such parallelisms constitute a maze from which few can escape without loss, and Irving was no exception.

Irving's view of the Bible was in strong contrast to that of his friend, Coleridge. One of Coleridge's biographers says that his last theological treatise was written as a protest to Irving's point of view, namely, "Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit".⁽²⁾ For Irving the authority of the Bible lay in verbal inspiration. In the "Confessions" Coleridge rebels against such a theory of infallible inspiration which, he said, "petrifies at once the whole body of Holy Writ with all its harmonies and symmetrical gradations, -- this breathing organism, this glorious panharmonium, -- into a colossal Memnon's head, a hollow passage for a voice, a voice that mocks the voices

(1) Sermon by Reverend H.D. Bulteel, Oxford 1832.

(2) "Samuel Taylor Coleridge" - Alois Brandl, London 1887
Page 377.

of many men, and speaks in their names, and yet is but one voice and the same; - and no man uttered it, and never in human heart was it conceived".⁽¹⁾ In the place of this theory Coleridge would substitute a belief in the Book after a belief in Christ and only in such portions as find the individual. But Irving never attained to this position, and consequently he struggled on to the end in the mire of typology and symbolism.

b. The Trinity. Irving's theology was dogmatic rather than Biblical, and the accepted formula of belief was to be preferred to the bare, incomplete realities of a purely Biblical doctrine. So the doctrine of the Trinity in all its completeness was read back into the Gospel narrative; in fact Irving was ready to say that the incarnation was chiefly valuable, "not for the sake of atonement, which is a mere part of its infinite fruitfulness, but for the sake of manifesting the Godhead, as outward from the creature, --- and the subsistence of the Godhead in three persons."

Then with the sure step of a Milton he proceeded to show the mysteries of the Trinity. His knowledge of the inner workings of the triune economy is astonishing! He could portion out with sure hand the tasks of Deity! Under his rather mechanical treatment the doctrine of the Trinity came very near to a doctrine of Tritheism, for

such diversely working Persons could not possibly be one God! Then having divided up the Deity into three he went on to lose the vital meaning of all three in the technical workings of the system; Christ became impersonal, as we shall see, the Holy Spirit was set apart as beyond the realm of worship, and God, the Father, was lost in an overpowering array of impossible adjectives. It must be confessed that Irving developed no rich or suggestive ideas of God, and he used what ideas he had received concerning God's unchanging, self-originating will and infinite power to obscure the very God of his fathers. To him God was absolutely everything; to us today that God would be absolutely nothing.

It is not a wild inference to say that here we see very strongly the influence of Milton. With a poet's sure hand Milton painted in lively colors the working of the Godhead. Everything in that heavenly picture of "Paradise Lost" is clear and definite. The Son is a distinct personality from the Father with his own apportioned duties; and the bounds of heaven appear in clearest outline. When he read it, Irving probably made the adjustment in his own mind between the spiritual fact and the poet's picture. But the picture remained where the adjustment was lost, and ever afterward his spiritual perception was strongly colored by the poetic and rather earthly representation. For instance he said in one of his sermons that the region above the heavens,

(1)

the third heaven, is God's dwelling place.

c.Satan. His Satanic Majesty was also shown in clearer lines because of Milton's "Paradise Lost". Satan seems to have been a full reality to Irving, for we find copious reference to him both in the private writing and in the public utterance. He is described quite definitely as a fallen angel, the leader of the wicked angels in enmity to God. Satan had an important role to play in the drama of salvation, for it was through Satan that sin was transplanted to the earth (Miltonic!) and thus Satan was made "the cause of the revelation of the love of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the sanctification of the Spirit".⁽²⁾ He was the 'piece de resistance' of Christ's victorious struggle, and at Christ's resurrection he was cast from heaven. With the same naive assurance Irving stated that Satan is "to roam at large for a short time over the principality of the air and the principedom of the world, thereafter to be chained in the bottomless pit a thousand years, and finally cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, to be tormented in it for ever and ever." At the present time Satan is the controlling power in this evil world with "the unchangeable law of God -- on his side". But to the modern reader Irving's Satan appears more interesting than evil, and the fangs of

(1)"Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses" Vol.I Pages 42, 72

(2)"Ben Ezra" - Introduction Page 183.

moral turpitude seem to have been effectually drawn. Satan is merely the actor playing the part opposite to God in the dualism of the universe. Yet his is a controlling part for it determines the very character of Christ's redemption. As we shall see, the presence of Satan gives a negative cast to the whole scheme of salvation.

Satan's "hated habitation", Hell, was also a vivid reality to Irving. A friend once said, "Mr. Irving will, by no means, soften matters with respect to hell,"⁽¹⁾ and we find, especially in the "Orations", descriptions of it which border on a materialistic view of this abode of the wicked angels. Apparently Irving had read Dante, Milton and Tasso on the subject. Without doubt the sulphurous lake in Irving's description harks back to Milton's verse. But whether Hell was to Irving material or spiritual, its realities of physical and mental anguish had moral meaning as deterrents in the Christian life. Irving quite sanely condemned those who set forth the horrors of Hell out of pure delight in a gruesome picture. "The level lake that burneth, and the solitary dungeon, and the desolate bosom, and the throes and tossings of horror and hopelessness, and the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched"⁽²⁾ are not to be chosen, but are to be avoided as the inevitable, logical and necessary

(1) "An Examination and Defence of the Writings and Preaching of the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M. by a Layman" Page 68

(2) "For the Oracles of God, Four Orations" - Page 64

outcome of a life of sin. There is no second chance, Hell is eternal, for if God can bear with this present world, he can tolerate eternal Hell.

Altogether the evil elements loom large in Irving's theology, and by the logic of dualism they control the positive elements.

d. Anthropology. Irving's theory of man, in common with his theories on most other subjects, was developed in connection with his theological system, and, as we can easily imagine in a mind that worked so mechanically, was largely determined by the demands of that system. At times it appears that he looked first to the requirements of the plan of salvation, and then outwardly to find confirmation and illustration thereof. His view of man tends to be more theoretical than practical; man is considered in the abstract, the generic. Human nature taken as a whole had for Irving a real unity of existence, was commonly affected, and could be operated upon in the mass. To Irving's mind the link of the individual to the generic 'man' amounted practically to a mystical union. This idea is fundamental to all Irving's thinking, and must be born in mind in tracing through the whole course of his theology.

However in the theory of man's internal organization there are visible more modern influences. In many places, perhaps due to Coleridge's influence, the Kantian theory came into prominence: upon the sense foundation there is in man a trichotomy of understanding, reason and moral will.⁽¹⁾ And to the end there persisted in Irving's theological consciousness the opposition between flesh and spirit. Spirit must dominate or all is wrong. Man's reason and will alone distinguish him from the lower creation, and when these faculties are subservient to sense, man becomes "the world's drudge" instead of "the world's monarch". (Consistent with his disdain for all sense domination Irving condemned outright the attempt of physiologists to show the connection between man's intelligence and the intelligence of animals.)

The personality of man consisteth in the will, said Irving, and the will of man became pivotal in his plan of redemption. That will must be reinforced and made certain if man is to come off victorious. Of course the function of the will became obscured in the practical working of the plan by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, but theoretically the will remained for Irving the focal point in the redemption of man.

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. III Pages 1026, 1027

The ideal man was of course Adam before the fall. Irving tried to argue against this "golden age" that is past and for an ideal yet to be realized. But to all practical intents Adam remained the possessor of all human virtues. "The best Christian that ever lived," Irving declared, "is a poor creature compared with Father Adam, while yet he trode the earth in the majesty of innocence with all the lower tribes attendant on his steps - his body purely attempered to the scene, his soul replete with celestial instincts - angels of light his visitants, and God himself cheering his yet unsullied habitation."⁽¹⁾ With the same free use of imagination Adam was elsewhere described as "the most happy, the most rich, and the most powerful of men."⁽²⁾

But this ideal, hypothetical picture of man was sadly wrecked by the fall. That event was one of the two great foci of Irving's theology. The fall fitted so perfectly into the system that he sometimes forgot the moral quality of it. In the onward movement of God's mighty purposes the fall was a necessary step, without which subsequent events could not have taken place. As Irving handled the idea, it ceased to be a culpable mistake, and was rather ordained of God "that the creatures might know their own insufficiency, their own emptiness."⁽³⁾

(1) Orations Page 210

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. III Page 105⁴

(3) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page (140) clxix

In spite of all that is said concerning the effects of the curse, the fall was really a step in advance, for it gave man a knowledge of good and evil. Moreover it was the immediate and formal cause of the incarnation. Of course the first cause lay in God's will, and the fall was foreseen and ordained of God. But the fall itself stands as the due preparation for the revelation of grace in Christ. In his fascination with the sweeping movement of redemption it is to be questioned whether Irving retained the ability to look at events in their true moral light.

Irving applied the generic idea of man to the fall: in Adam all men fell, for "all human persons did actually sin in Adam". To Irving this was of the nature of an axiom and did not need proof. This one transgression with its attendant curse brought death into the world together with all human woe. " By the action of this curse, man has become sadly changed; the gold has become dim, and the fine gold changed. His understanding is darkened; his will rebellious against the will of God; his affections disaffected from heavenly things; his memory of God defaced; his whole spiritual man in dotage or in death ---." ⁽¹⁾ In a word the curse lay in the exaltation of the sensual part of man's nature over the spiritual. But Irving did not let the matter drop with

(1) Sermon: "The Effect of the Curse upon Adam and His Posterity". (Thirty Sermons by the Rev. Edward Irving).

a simple statement. He pointed to all the evils of man as results of the fall. In the heat of his argument he overstated his own position, describing humanity in such vicious terms that when he attributed to Christ that same humanity, his opponents failed to recognize it as their own human nature. His fallen human nature tended to be a mere theological fiction, bearing little resemblance to the men and women who walked the streets of London in his day.

e. Sin. Irving had some very definite views concerning sin. Perhaps they were too definite for a subject which at best is relative. However that may be, he refused to use the terms with discrimination, and his very carelessness brought the charge of heresy upon him.

It is apparent that Irving sought a more reasonable view of sin than was generally accepted in his day. He defined sin in terms of will. In a moment of rare insight he declared, "Sin is an alienation of the will; it is a spiritual act against a Spirit;" but he fell back into the old orthodoxy when on the same page he defined sin "as an eternal and unchangeable, an ⁽¹⁾ original condition of the will". Had Irving stayed by his best and most original statement that sin of any kind can be committed only by a reasonable creature, he

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page 13

would have avoided the charge of heresy. But he there-
:upon proceeded to champion a straight doctrine of
original sin which did not at all come under the above
definition, and which when applied to Christ's human
nature seemed to cast a smirch upon his character. In
his treatment sin and original sin are a strange mixture
of moral and non-moral quantities. Irving failed to
distinguish between the purely ethical and the natural
basis for the ethical.

This " comfortable doctrine of original sin ", as
he put it, renders all mankind of one family under the
curse and dependent on God for redemption. The idea of
original sin as the possession of every soul that comes
into the world, is quite in harmony with Irving's full
confidence in God and his lack of confidence in man, for
he argues that to deny original sin is to reverse this
condition and thus to bring in Arminianism and to posit
in man a power to resist temptation independent of super-
:natural help. Original sin as a blanket term fitted
into his Calvinistic system too well to be seriously
challenged. The doctrine came from that system rather
than from Irving's own observation, and it is interesting
to see with what difficulty Irving applied the curse to
his own child. In the following passage Irving struggled
to harmonize system and experience: "Whoso studieth as I
have done, and reflecteth as I have sought to reflect,

upon the first twelve months of a child -- will rather marvel how the growth of that wonderful creature, which put forth such a glorious bud of being, should come to be so cloaked by the flesh, cramped by the world, and cut short by Satan, as not to become a winged seraph --." (1)

Actual sin was defined by Irving as a voluntary exaltation of the flesh over the spirit. Such a definition reminds one of Kant's idea of sin as sense-determination of the will. Doubtless Irving had heard Coleridge discuss the voluntariness of sin. (2)

The awfulness of sin is seen in its results, now and hereafter. The immediate effect of sin is to poison all the streams of life. And then in the longer view "the true character of Sin --- is, that it brings with it irremediable conclusions". (3) Irving never spoke a truer word!

Altogether we may say that Irving's view of sin lacks moral depth and experiential quality. The idea of sin is superinduced upon Christian experience rather than derived from such experience as its logical conclusion. Moreover, its connection with Satan, the hypothetical master of all evil, removed it from the strictly moral

(1) Preface to "Ben Ezra" lxxiy

(2) Coleridge told Irving the contents of "Aids to Reflection" before the book was published. In it he spoke of original sin and actual sin.

(3) "Orations" ("Issues of Judgment") - Page 409

sphere to a world of causation out of human control.

f. View of the World. It is difficult to give a coherent account of Irving's view of the world because there are in it materialistic as well as idealistic elements which cannot be brought into harmony. Irving theoretically held to a spiritual interpretation of nature. All matter is "the Godhead putting forth its power according to its will", ⁽¹⁾ will being elsewhere described as of the nature of reality. Then, by his usual axiomatic reasoning, Irving argued that because what God does once he does forever, matter has an eternal existence. His eschatology had therefore a very materialistic character. But even so - the spiritual interpretation must be the final one: "all nature is -- a visible impression of the spiritual truth which is behind; and as the day hideth the stars, so the vision of things hideth the spiritual meaning of things". ⁽²⁾ This view of nature probably came from John Hutchinson of the seventeenth century.

Nature, reasoned Irving, has had its golden age. Before the fall it existed in a perfect state such as only Irving's roving imagination could picture. Then nature was all that it is not today. The beasts were

(1) Homilies on the Lord's Supper Page 545
 (2) Homilies on Baptism Page 142

under the dominion of man, and the vegetable kingdom yielded everything to man's support. Even "the trees, the tall and stately trees, where mellow fruits do yet furnish his appetite with its richest feast, bent themselves to his hand, and presented ready cooked and dressed a treat to every sense of sight, of smell, of taste and feeling."⁽¹⁾ It was a condition of "spontaneous fertility".

But all creation hung upon man's conduct, and when man fell, all else went down with him. Just why this connection held true did not concern Irving. Neither did it disturb his moral sense that the curse consequent upon man's transgression brought all the non-rational universe into a state of sin and death. "The earth forgot her voluntary fruitfulness, and bristled with noisome, prickly weeds; the plants forgot their wholesomeness; the creatures their peacefulness; mankind their blessedness; that very instant the world became the scene of that solitary transgression."⁽²⁾ The waste places of the earth with all their thorns and thistles were to Irving sufficient proof of its fallen character. He was even ready to say that this is now an antagonist creation in a state of war with God. God has given the world to Satan who rules it, and under its present constitution the world is "as full of sin as it can be crammed".

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol. III Page 1052
 (2) Orations Page 414

It is interesting to note the contrast of this view with that of the romantic poets of the early nineteenth century. Irving said that we are to use creation under the knowledge that it is ruled by the prince of darkness, to look at it with the eye of reason and not of sense, and that we are not to be bound by it. At the same time the romantic poets, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, were finding in the beauties of nature not only their most inspiring subjects but the very revelation of God. Irving set his face against these "idolaters of the visible creation", describing them as "scene hunters" and "scene describers". The author of "Childe Harold" seems to have been the particular object of his venom, and Irving's "Argument for Judgment" was written to counteract the effect of poems on the same subject by Byron and Southey. Probably Byron was one of those he had in mind when he spoke of "this atheistical scribbler, or that ignorant blasphemer"⁽¹⁾. Irving made the contrast of views in his own words: "They say, 'What talk you of a prison-house? This earth is a spacious theatre of blooming beauty and rich enjoyment, and no prison-house or wilderness, such as your theologians do prattle of'"⁽²⁾. It is quite clear that Irving's cursed world was due to the demands of the system of theology and not to his own

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. II Page 710

(2) Sermons on John the Baptist delivered in 1823, edited by G. Carlyle M.A. 1864 Page 83

observation, for when he was off his guard, his words lapsed into a normal appreciation of natural beauty:

"And truly the outward world seems formed on very purpose to whet our capacities of pleasure. There is no fruit that has not a fragrance or a sweetness, or out of which may not be drawn rich juices and balmy wine; and the flowers have their sweetness, rich hues, and beautiful proportions --." (1)

In another place he attributed this freshness and beauty of nature to the future perfect condition which it foreshadows (naturans - 'about to be born'). We are to look not backward to the glories of Eden but forward to the perfections of the world in the millenium.

Even before Irving arrived at a full confidence in the millennial hope, he believed in a very material 'next world'. In the "Orations" he wrote of heaven as a place of intense activity of both mind and body, the scene of "thrilling joys of flesh and blood".⁽²⁾ Later he retracted some of this emphasis on the fleshly elements, but to the end he believed that heaven had very material aspects.

Taken as a whole Irving's cosmology is somewhat mediaeval: the world and sense (the human link with the world) are evil and are to be treated as channels of temptation by Satan. Such a view tends to project on the non-rational world moral qualities. Irving declared

(1) Sermon in "The Pulpit" - February 15, 1824
(2) Page 387

that the created world was "sinful", a careless use of the term which in another case brought upon him the wrath of the church.

By the very force of his presentation Irving gave consistency to the structure of his theology. Its main points received constant reiteration in the treatment of almost every subject. That it had its weaknesses is already evident. The conclusions of doctrine from such a background concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ will be the subject of the following chapters.

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"Heresy!"

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Chapter III.

"Heresy!"

The background of Irving's theology should not be considered as his own peculiar possession. In large measure he shared it with the great body of the orthodox of his day, and in many respects he was the most orthodox of the orthodox. His early popularity was due to the very energy with which he upheld the standards of the church in doctrine and morals - certainly not to any suggestion of liberalism. And in the cardinal doctrines of the person and work of Jesus Christ Irving himself thought he was well within the bounds of the accepted belief. He was presenting only what he thought was neglected truth.

Probably the charge of heresy would never have been applied to Irving, if it had not been for the prying ways of a certain Reverend Henry Cole of the Church of England. It happened that during the summer of 1827 Irving was asked to preach for the Gospel Tract Society, and he chose for his text Titus II 11: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation". The report of the sermon in "The Pulpit" (August 2, 1827) indicates that Irving defined salvation in terms of the perfect obedience of Christ under the power of the Holy Spirit in the face of the full round of human temptation. To make

that temptation real he described the body of Christ as "sinful flesh", fallen human nature. "It had," he declared, "every form of infirmity common to man; it was exposed to every form of temptation, though it never yielded. Evil brooded over it, but could not hatch. Wicked spirits surrounded him, but could not subdue." Throughout the sermon there were the familiar passages of Scripture connecting Christ and the fact of sin.

As it stands, the sermon contains evident errors. But if it had been ignored as the passing vagary of a hasty preacher, Irving might have checked himself in due course. The apparent heresy was enunciated for the support of a practical point of truth. But the news of the error came to the ears of Cole who seems to have had sufficient leisure for heresy-hunting in another denomination. A few months before this time he had published a tract on the immortality of Christ's human nature. Argument for such a thesis would be in direct opposition to Irving's desire for a real humanity. Cole took up the matter, and in October of the same year he visited the Caledonian Chapel. Here he heard Irving call Christ's body "That sinful substance!" and declare, "The main part of his victory consisted in his overcoming the sin and corruption in his human nature." In an interview with Cole after the service Irving maintained the sinlessness of Christ, but as strongly held for a mortal, corrupt and corruptible human nature in the Master: "Christ could

always say with Paul, 'Yet not I, but sin that dwelleth in me'. The horrified Cole immediately placarded the heresy in an open letter to Irving. Irving in turn proceeded with all his characteristic energy to broadcast his doctrine, and carry it to its most extreme statement.

(1)
The struggle was on!

In almost every published document after 1827 Irving made mention of the "sinfulness of Christ's humanity". "Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses" appeared late in 1828, and the first of the three volumes bears the marks of having been enlarged at the last moment in order to include the fullest elaboration of the new doctrine. "The Morning Watch", a journal of prophecy, appeared, and the first article in the theological department, apparently by Irving's hand, dealt with this theme of what he considered a real humanity in Christ. Scattered through the pages of this short-lived journal are to be found the strongest utterances of Irving and his friends on the familiar subject. In 1829 Irving made another visit to Scotland, and it was the occasion for an open avowal in his homeland of all his peculiar dogmas including this latest passion. It received restatement in two large pamphlets.

(1) Cole's pamphlet was entitled, "The True Significance of the English Adjective Mortal, and the awfully Erroneous Consequences of the Application of that Term to the ever Immortal Body of Jesus Christ".

"The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature"(1830), and "Christ's Holiness in Flesh" (1831). Still another pamphlet, "The Day of Pentecost, or The Baptism with the Holy Ghost"(1831) gave his extreme position on the person of Christ.

The ordinary utterance of Irving on the subject had an extreme quality. He could not tone down his words, but he must ever give them forth in their harshest, most repulsive form. In the first named pamphlet he wrote, "Conceive every variety of human passion, every variety of human affection, every variety of human error, every variety of human wickedness, which hath ever been realized, inherent in the humanity, and combined against the holiness of him who was not only a man, but the Son of Man --".⁽¹⁾ And again in the same work he described Christ's humanity as "bristling thick and strong with sin like the hairs upon the porcupine".⁽²⁾

Such unguarded statements openly flaunted were like a red rag to an angry bull that had already been pricked to the point of petulance by previous thrusts. Irving called down upon himself a storm of criticism and contempt, not only in London, but also in Scotland. The chief weapon of this criticism seems to have been a recital of Irving's own words of an extreme character. Cole and

(1) Page 17

(2) Page 126

the members of Presbytery were his chief antagonists in London, while in Edinburgh J.A. Haldane and Doctor A.Thomson took up the challenge in company with "The Edinburgh Christian Instructor" which expressed the views of Doctor Marcus Dods of Bedford. Irving was not without his supporters - Henry Drummond, Reverend A.J.Scott (his assistant) and Reverend H.B. Maclean of London Wall Chapel. There is some evidence of sympathy from clergymen in the Church of England. The controversy waxed hot, with a free admixture of vilification and personalities on both sides. It would be correct to say that neither party took the trouble to define accurately the position of the opposition, and each side built "men of straw" only to knock them down. At no point did they exchange blows squarely on the points at issue.

But the controversy served to crystallize what Irving had been dimly suggesting, and the side-issue became the subject of chief concern. In the heat of the wordy battle Irving overstated his own position, and allowed himself to be carried far beyond what he had originally intended. Numerous contradictions add to the difficulty of setting forth the kernel of belief. In a calmer moment Irving wrote to a doubting friend this statement which summarizes in part his Christology:

"Concerning the flesh of Christ - I believe it to have been no better than other flesh, as to its passive qualities or propensities as a creature thing; but

that the power of the Son of God as son of man in it, believing in the Father, did for his obedience to become son of man receive such a measure of the Holy Ghost as sufficed to resist its own proclivity to the world and to Satan, and to make it obedient unto God in all things: which measure of the Spirit he received in his generation and so had holy flesh."(1)

In a word - Christ as Son of God assumed by a full kenosis human nature as it is under the fall, passed through a real human temptation, and established his holiness in the only way open to man, namely, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Irving himself would have preferred the practical statement: Christ is one with us in his flesh, his temptation experience, and his possession of the Holy Ghost.

It was largely from practical considerations of the Christian life that Irving arrived at this Christological doctrine which connected the person of Christ so intimately with the fact of sin. In his early sermons, even in those which do not bear directly on the subject of Christ, we find much of the material for his heresy without its full statement. The "John the Baptist" sermons (1823) describe a Christ who lived a life which we may imitate, and even here we find that phrase of Irving's which echoed on to the end, "-that we might follow His steps"⁽²⁾. This sympathizing human Son of God had "to brave all the ills and natural

(1) "Irvingism and Mormonism" - Rev. Emilius Guers
 (2) Sermons on John the Baptist delivered in 1823, edited by G. Carlyle, M.A. 1864 Page 97

maladies which sin hath brought upon the world; to be tempted by the alternate powers of the devil, the world, and the flesh," "to come down into the shaded forest chamber of this suffering world, to sound the depths of sorrow, and become acquainted with the extreme passages of grief."⁽¹⁾ In this last quotation we find the spirit which breathed through all the course of Irving's heresy - a sympathizing Christ who is the Captain, the file-leader of our salvation.

But we catch more than the spirit of the heresy in these early writings. Four years before the charge was hurled against him Irving practically stated the point on which he was accused: "This is the spirit of His incarnation, one great end and meaning of His manifestation in sinful flesh, to teach humanity how there resideth with the Spirit of God a power to fortify humanity and make it victorious over all trials and temptations." Here Christ stands as the "experiment made in the world of human nature of very flesh and blood, being preyed upon at all points, and standing fast in its integrity through the mighty operation of that Spirit which is freely offered to perform the same office in all who

(1) Sermons on John the Baptist Pages 97 and 98.

will take up His cross and follow His footsteps". To all practical purposes this is the substance of his heresy, beyond which Irving never advanced. Indeed it seems to have been too advanced a point to hold, and Irving apparently did not reach it again until 1827.

The great body of his Christology, of which the heresy was a minor point, is contained in the "Temptation Sermons" given also in 1823. There Irving asserted unequivocally the reality of the temptation experience of Christ. To this end he described Christ as a true man: " In all the sensations of flesh and blood He partook, - He was liable to hunger and thirst, to heat and cold; His appetite longed with all desires natural to man, and His heart had pleasure in the savours and relishes of the things which are created and made. - - In all these bodily attributes, therefore, was He very man. Again, in respect to what is called the mind of man, and those feelings which the world produces in us, He was also as one of the children. - - Further, the outward world affected the Saviour as it affects every human being."⁽¹⁾

The reality of Christ's humanity is merely the other side of the great moral fact of his temptation experience,

(1) Sermons on "The Temptation" delivered 1823, edited by G. Carlyle, M.A. 1864 Pages 216 and 217.

for he argues in the same place that in bestowing upon Christ the power of being acted upon by temptation and the liability to err in all human ways, "we do not take from His divinity, we do but make good his humanity, which is an attribute of His being no less important than the other". It is to be noted that Irving's idea of humanity is here more natural and unaffected than it was in later years. Christ simply became one of us, a natural man to be described^s in ordinary terms. Irving here made sure that his "superior faculties" did not rob his temptation of its moral quality; and he had not yet come to the point of describing Christ in sub-moral terms. Our Lord was simply "Adam, sent not into paradise, but into hell, for the trial of His faithfulness, and enduring all the tortures of hell with no defalcation of His faithfulness"⁽¹⁾.

So it is that at this early period we find the general outline of his later heresy. Yet there seems to have been no hint of any accusation that he was unorthodox.

There is observable, however, a change, about the year 1827, in his ideas of the source of Christ's temptations and sufferings. In his preface to "Ben Ezra" he repeated what he had said before, that Christ took

"a human body, passive flesh," and in it passed through a real "experience of agony, both inward and outward,- horrors of darkness and clouds of grief within, as well as pains and afflictions and torments without".⁽¹⁾ "Passive humanity" it was, "obnoxious to

every temptation and begirt with every sinless infirm-⁽²⁾ :ity". So far the temptation was described as

coming to Christ through the channel of his flesh.

This idea was consistently maintained even in the earliest sermons in the volumes, "Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses"⁽³⁾ (1828). Christ's flesh was "obnoxious", that is, liable, to every sort of temptation, and his human nature was in itself "mortal and corruptible". In this statement of the case Irving was in harmony with the Scottish Confession.

But two of these "Incarnation" sermons, "The Method

(1) The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty by Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra 1827 Introduction Page 117

(2) Op. cit. Page 130

(3) Mrs. Oliphant assigned these sermons to the year 1825, and Irving's diary-journal indicates that he was in that year preaching on the humiliation of Christ from the Epistle to the Hebrews. But it seems improbable that these sermons should have been allowed to lie so long unpublished. Irving's own words settle the matter finally. In the dedication of "The Last Days" (July 1828) he gave the order of his works, and the "true humanity of Christ in fallen state" was placed after the doctrine of Gentile Apostacy (1826) and the doctrine of Baptism (1828)

of accomplishing the Mystery, is by taking up the Fallen Humanity into the Personality of the eternal Son of God", and "Conclusions concerning the subsistence of God and the subsistence of the Creature", were added after the "outcry" against the doctrine of Christ's fallen human nature,⁽¹⁾ and reflect quite a change. Hitherto Irving had laid no great emphasis on the state in which Christ's humanity was found. It was a real humanity, that was all. Now he proclaimed that Christ's triumph was also over sin in the flesh, because that flesh was fallen, under the curse of Adam's fall. His syllogism became: Mary's flesh with that of all mankind was fallen, Christ took flesh of the substance of his mother, and therefore Christ's flesh was fallen. Just this one simple step changed the complexion of his theology and called down upon him the charge of heresy.

It is impossible to say exactly what was the cause of this adjustment of his doctrine to the old lapsarian theology. His first biographer has pointed to a possible source of this change - the influence of the Rev. Mr. E. T. Vaughan. Undoubtedly Irving was a close friend of Vaughan of Leicester.⁽²⁾ (At Vaughan's death Irving dedicated a poem to him.) That Vaughan held views similar to those proclaimed by Irving, may be

(1) Preface iv, v.

(2) Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol. II Page 60.

deduced from a letter from "E. T. V." written just before his death and contributed to the Morning Watch Vol. II Page 196. It was Vaughan's belief, there expressed, that redemption comes by the "junction of the Second Person with the creature in its ruin". He would even go so far as to make original sin "necessary to the Second Person's being made Christ, because Christ is the offspring of reproduction, which implies forfeiture of first being". The connection becomes still clearer when we note in this same letter that strange, artificial purpose assigned to the Incarnation which we find in Irving, namely, the establishment of "the difference between the blessed creature and God". Moreover about the year 1820 Vaughan had published a tract defending Calvinism, and from the nature of that tract it would be expected that Vaughan's influence upon Irving should be in the direction of a more rigid adherence to the doctrinal standards relating to original sin.⁽¹⁾ But whether or no Vaughan was responsible for Irving's error, we do have grounds for the conclusion that the exact form of the heresy was not original with Irving, in a letter which he himself quoted in the sermon on the Method of the Incarnation. There is a certain deference in Irving's words: "I cannot here refrain from relieving and adorning

(1) In this tract "The Calvinistic Clergy Defended" Vaughan's main thesis is that the Thirty-Nine Articles hold a strong doctrine of original sin. It is even possible to find Irving's heresy in its pages: "God, in his second person, unites himself to the offending nature without offence - acts in that nature as truly a partaker of it, having taken the manhood into God - in that nature does the whole will of God, and thereby weaves out a meritorious righteousness." Section 4.

this argument by a quotation from the letter of a dear friend, whose thoughts upon this subject I wish he would embody in some more lasting and enduring form".⁽¹⁾ The letter itself maintained that the reality of Christ's temptation hangs upon the presence of evil thoughts in the mind of Christ. Of course these thoughts were invariably subdued and isolated, but their very presence was "monumental of the Saviour's triumph".⁽²⁾ In this writer Irving found a kindred spirit, for the writer quotes with emphasis what is Irving's favorite theme: "Remember Christ: as he overcame, so must I."

But in all such speculations concerning the source of this lapsarian tinge to his Christology which put the real conflict in the soul of Christ, it must be remembered that this is only the cap-stone to the structure that arose out of his own thinking. The main outline was already present, and this "sinful humanity" doctrine was added almost as an after-thought. We must therefore seek in Irving's own mind for the real source of the peculiarities in his theory of the person and work of Christ.

Without doubt what took place in that prolific brain was in reaction to the current thought of his time. As stated above, Unitarianism became very

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol.I
Page (140) lxxix

(2) Vol.I Page (140) lxxx

vigorous in England at about this time, and it would come to Irving through Coleridge and others. Its very spirit of rationalism would put on him the necessity of establishing a rational basis for his Christology. Then at the opposite extreme was the great body of Evangelicals with their "cut-and-dried", time-worn theories of the atonement. Irving never broke away completely from the theory of substitutionary atonement, but his peculiar theology may properly be interpreted as an attempt to get behind such an arbitrary explanation of the work of Christ. Irving's sincere spirit recoiled from the imputation of our sins to Christ, for he thought that it made "God consider a person to be what he is not, and act towards him as that which he is not". "If that is the meaning of their imputation and substitution, or by whatever name they call it;" wrote Irving, "away with it! away with it from my theology for ever! for it makes my God a God of fictions, a God of variableness, a God of make-believes, and not of truths." ⁽¹⁾ The mechanical action of this "profit and loss" theology, this "bargain and barter" hypothesis of the atonement, did not satisfy Irving. His objection to this "debtor and creditor" plan of redemption was the same as the objection to conversion - that it takes religion from the moral level. Redemption is not to be founded on

(1) Quoted in David Brown's letter to a friend which was published in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor February and March 1833

the mere pangs and sufferings of Christ, no more than on the mere facts of Christian experience. His whole aim was to keep religion on the intelligible level of cause and effect.

So Irving would reinterpret on rational grounds the great truths of the incarnation and the atonement. "Christ's name is not a talisman," he wrote, "Christ's cross is not a sign, upon making which certain consequences should follow."⁽¹⁾ Elsewhere he condemned the mere contemplation of the agony of Christ. To his mind religion was "the science of obligations",⁽²⁾ and it must remain founded on that moral level. In spite of all his credulity he would dispel all magic from the realm of soteriology and find, if possible, the deeper and causal connection between Christ and the salvation of men. The moral temper of his early preaching was sufficiently strong to carry over into this field which is so mysterious. Thus he would see the aptness of Christ's own person and deeds to accomplish the great purpose of redemption. Dods, Irving's strongest opponent, saw that such was the tone of his reasoning, and he had Irving in mind when he wrote,

"The man who believes in Christ's ability to save, not because God hath declared it, but because he can see some aptitude in the work of Christ itself, independent of the will of God, to accomplish salvation, believes this truth upon a ground which deprives it of all its saving

(1) Pamphlet: Christ's Holiness in Flesh Page 96

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol.III Page 820

power. His faith rests not upon the Word of God, but upon human wisdom." (1)

For that matter Irving had already stated as the title of the first sermon on the Incarnation that "the Beginning and Origin of the Mystery that the Eternal Word should take unto himself a body, is the holy will and good pleasure of God". But he could not be content with this "arbitrary" explanation; for if the Gospel Christ had no causal connection with the desired result, then why, he asked, did the Son of God become flesh at all? Dods was of course right in referring the whole scheme of redemption back finally to the will of God, but Irving was also right in seeking out the moral nexus of the actual execution of that will. Christ would not redeem men, if it were at the expense of their sense of the moral fitness of things. It remains to be seen whether Irving was successful in this venture, and whether the fullness of the person and work of Christ can be appreciated if we remain only on the moral level.

This process of rationalization was more or less a conscious one, but below the level of consciousness lay the fundamental source of that which was peculiar in his theology. The preacher himself is always his own best audience, and Irving's theology was adapted first of all to the needs of his own life. That self-depreciation, that sense of the fearfulness of temptation,

(1) Edinburgh Christian Instructor March 1830 Review of Publications on Christ's human Nature Page 201

which we have noted above, needed a Gospel of Absolute Assurance. The temptation of Christ lived for him because of the conflict within his own breast. He started from this fact of community of experience between Christ and men, and henceforth the element of sympathy lay very near to the foundation of his theology. This "fellow-feeling of all our pains"⁽¹⁾ in the experience of Jesus must be had at the expense of any consequences. The immediate consequence was of course a real humanity in that Christ. As we have seen, this entailed the ascription to it of all properties that are common to men under the fall - in other words, it was "sinful flesh". Born as we are with the proclivity to sin, we are to be comforted in the realization that "our Lord's flesh was altogether such as ours",⁽²⁾ and that he passed through a similar experience of struggle. In this respect it is a Gospel of Sympathy. But sympathy shades into the larger feeling of assurance when we realize that in the person of the Holy Ghost there is open to us and to Christ the strong power to overcome. As he overcame, so must we if we follow in his footsteps. Solidarity with Christ was to Irving the substance of his Gospel. Christ is one with us in flesh, in experience, in the possession of the Holy Ghost. The spirit of his theology was truly

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol. I Page (140) lxxviii

(2) Letter to his wife, August 4, 1828, quoted in Mrs. Oliphant's Life Vol. II Page 47

expressed by that "tongue" which broke into one of his expositions: "Oh, walk with Jesus, be one with Jesus, be one with Jesus!"⁽¹⁾ And in this linking together of Christ with men, it was the needs of contemporary Christian life, rather than a new appreciation of the historic Christ, which were determinative and final.

In the next three chapters we shall proceed to a more careful examination of these three points of contact: Christ's oneness with us in flesh, in experience, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. In each of these points Irving saw redemptive contacts, although in his writings we find no indication that he made any such three-fold division of salvation.

(1) September 28, 1832

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Chapter IV.

Christ, Our Brother

Although in the controversy under consideration Christ's likeness to us in flesh became the chief question of discussion, in the theological system of Irving its value was secondary and derivative. It was the "foundation of Christian verity" rather than the substance of Christian truth, and its place was demonstrated by other doctrines. But because it is so basic to any treatment of the person of Christ, and because it figured so prominently in this controversy, we may well look first into this likeness of the body of Christ to fallen human nature.

1. Theoretical Constitution of the Person of Christ. A description of the theoretical constitution of the person of Christ in Irving's work must be necessarily an abstraction from many statements throughout his writings, for Irving never set Christ in a calm and reasoning light apart from his practical value for men. However there is plainly evident a rationale of Christ's person which Irving shared in large part with the Church of his day.

A number of axioms were considered as final in any view of the Saviour. By all of Irving's authorities

including Hooker, the two natures in Christ were distinct, one from the other. In their zeal for the ancient phrase, "without confusion", they generally forgot that the starting point for any view of Christ must be the unity of his person, and not the duality of natures which is the deduction from that unity. But the Westminster Confession prevailed: "Two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion."⁽¹⁾ This distinctness and fullness of natures required two separate wills in our Lord - a demand of orthodox theology which Irving vigorously championed. The reconciliation of these wills, human and divine, in Christ was to his mind a large part of the task of redemption.

This mosaic character of the person of Christ was further heightened in Irving's system by breaking up the two elements into still other two. The equation became: Christ equals Divine (Son of God plus Holy Ghost) plus human (body plus soul). The personality of Christ was of course the personality of the Second Person of the Trinity whose preexistence Irving never questioned. In fact he described the Son as acting and talking before the Incarnation,⁽²⁾ in all the vividness of Milton's poetry. But

(1) Irving said, "I would not give the truth expressed in these words of the Catechism, 'Two distinct natures, and one person forever,' for all the truths that by human language have ever been expressed." See Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses Vol. I Page (140) lxxiii

(2) Sermon on Galatians II 20 delivered on January 9, 1833.

since any act of the Godhead must have the consent and cooperation of all its persons, and since the Son was ready to do what the Father had willed, it therefore remained for the Holy Ghost to carry this action of God becoming man into visible execution. It must be so, for "always at that point where a work of Godhead comes into manifestation, and real outwardness, the Holy Ghost is the actor"⁽¹⁾. The Third Person took the part of a link between the person of the Son and the human element, just as it serves in the Trinity as the vinculum. In this way Irving thought to avoid confusion of natures.

To the Divine element is joined the human without confusion or essential change, and this union is established forever. For this idea of permanent union of the human nature to the person of the Son Irving had only to follow his favorite teacher, Hooker, who asserted with some confidence that Christ's body continues in heaven of the same nature and measure that it had on earth.⁽²⁾ Irving himself said that Christ's body now is "atom for atom, the virgin's substance",

(1) Pamphlet: "The Opinion circulated concerning Our Lord's Human Nature tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith by a Minister of the Church of Scotland" (Edward Irving) - Edinburgh 1830 Pages 28 and 29.

(2) Ecclesiastical Polity - Book V Section V

changed by the resurrection of course, but still a body of flesh. There is throughout a strong emphasis on the fleshly element, due perhaps to the Scottish Confession which Irving so strongly favored.

It was a real human nature that the Son of God assumed in this permanent relationship. Theoretically the union did not rob the human element of its characteristics. "The human nature -- remained, nevertheless, perfectly distinct and entire, in its substance, essential properties, and common infirmities."⁽¹⁾ Yet it was Irving's contention that the Church did not speak one voice on this subject, many ministers having fallen into the heresy of an unreal humanity, "an incorruptible body". The truth of the case is that Irving judged all others by his own individual standard, and his strong emphasis on the humanity dimmed their milder statements.

Measured by absolute standards, Irving's description of Christ's human nature was sadly marred by the absence of human personality. This position he held in common with his opponents and the tradition of the Church from early times. Irving insisted on a human soul in Christ as essential to his being a real man, but by some strange distinction the human soul was separate from personality

(1) Pamphlet: "The Doctrine held by the Church of Scotland concerning the Human Nature of our Lord as stated in her Standards" (by Rev. Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle, Advocate) - Edinburgh 1830 Proposition III under Question II Page 35.

(which in the human sense Christ did not have) and played little part in the constitution of Christ.

"He is not, as it were, an individual of the sinful individuals: he is not a human person: he never had personal subsistence as a mere man."⁽¹⁾ Irving called Christ's human nature a "personable substance", and found reason for this unearthly quality in the virgin birth which allowed him to take human nature apart from personality. He reasoned that "a responsible personality" must "depend upon ordinary conception".⁽²⁾

At random Christ chose a portion of the "perilous stuff" of human nature, which should serve as a "vessel"⁽³⁾ for the divine element. He found, as others before him had found, that the idea of a "vessel" was a suggestive one for the humanity of Christ and that it served well the purposes of a hollow Incarnation. Two persons in Christ were unthinkable! Therefore he ran directly into the opposite danger of an impersonal human nature.

(1) Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses Vol. I Page (140) lxi Compare Dr. Thomson's statement: "The Son of God did not dwell in any individual of the species." Morning Watch Vol. I No. IV Review of Dr. Thomson's Sermons. Sermon XVI

(2) Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature Page 82

(3) "This humanity was like the receptacle of His higher powers. It was the vessel which bore them about for the consolation of the sorrowful earth, and from which the earth might partake them and be blessed." Sermons on the Temptation, delivered in 1823, edited by G. Carlyle M.A. 1864 Page 226

After all it was only a passive role that Christ's manhood had to play, according to Irving. God cannot suffer, he reasoned. Therefore God assumed human nature that he might go through an experience of suffering. And in accordance with the axiom of the distinction of natures, the human nature alone suffered in the sufferings of Christ!

So far Irving would have been considered within the bounds of orthodoxy.

2. The Person of Christ in Irving's Practical Treatment. What Irving sought was a working Gospel, and in his practical use of this theoretic structure of the idea of Christ there are observable many changes. The two-natured Christ became in practical service one: "The words, and acts, and sufferings of Christ, are not to be called of the Divine nature only, but of the person⁽¹⁾ Christ, God-man; one person though two natures."

And that one person became the humanity energized by the Holy Ghost! Irving held to a full kenosis. The person of the Son came stripped of all Godhead properties, else there would be confusion of natures. The divinity of Christ had to exchange "for

(1) Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page (328) liv

its blessedness, suffering; for its infinity, narrow limitation; for its power, weakness; for its glory, shame; for its life, death!" The divine Person so suspended his properties of Godhead that he became fully equal to a man. This kenotic emphasis was due largely to the demands of the idea of redemption as a parallel to the trial of Adam. Christ, the second Adam, must have no "new properties beyond what Adam had". Only so could the trial be made real and the parallel be maintained.

The person of the Son of God became still further obscured in Irving's treatment by the prominence given to the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, as we have seen, was the active agent in the Incarnation. Irving gave to the Spirit the chief place in the active person of Christ, and Christ became practically a duality of two truncated natures. For with the rest of the Church he denied human personality a place in Christ's being; the divine nature, if there is such a thing apart from personality, seems never to have figured at all; and what remained was the Holy Ghost actuating that part of man which he holds in common "with the beasts that perish".

Yet Irving steadily maintained that this human nature, thus decapitated, was real in its essence and properties. By the dialectic of traditional and formal theology Irving could look at the human nature of Christ apart

from the rest of his being. The idea of a superinduced personality set the humanity apart as an entity by itself. Was not each nature "distinct and entire"? Considered in this way it could be said to have qualities all its own, independent of the rest of the Saviour's nature. This body, so considered, must be a real body like that of other men. But theology declared that all men are fallen, and that their flesh is "sinful". Irving accepted this reasoning as well as the conclusion: Christ took human nature under the fall, and since that nature is sinful, Christ's body was sinful. The order in Irving's mind was: first, the reality or the "humanness" of Christ's human nature, and then the sinfulness of it as a necessary deduction. To deny this fact is to deny Christ's "evenness" with us and to set him off from all contacts of sympathy or assurance. By force of controversy it became of cardinal importance to Irving, the one foundation of all his theology. "To know and to understand how the Son of God took sinful flesh, and yet was sinless," he wrote after three years of dispute, "is the alpha and the omega -- of orthodox theology."⁽¹⁾

3. The Sinful Humanity of Christ. To the rank and file of the Church this was a blasphemous contradiction - two mutually exclusive ideas that could not in any way be

(1) Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature Page 18

included in the one concept of the Saviour. To hear of the Saviour connected so closely with sin awoke in the mind of the Church a very natural horror. But Irving had a double recourse from such a feeling: either he kept the two ideas in different compartments of his mind, or he resolved the awfulness of one member.

To the mind of Irving's time the idea of the "fall" and its result, "original sin", carried a very positive meaning, even if the distinctions were not always observed. Adam fell and brought all men into a state of ruin. Original sin is the projection of that one act upon all human life. According to the Larger Catechism original sin consists in the guilt of Adam's sin, the want of original righteousness and the corruption of man's nature. The guilt of that one transgression attaches to all men, for all sinned in Adam. Therefore the punishment applies to all, in the form of infirmities and death. Wherever suffering and death are found, there is fallen human nature, for Adam before the fall was exempt from them. Because he sinned we must die according to the generic law of all flesh. Sin and death are inseparable. "Where there is mortality there must, of necessity, be sin;" wrote Cole, "and where there is sin, there must, of necessity,

be mortality." This relationship holds true, said Irving and his contemporaries, because man's very nature is corrupt. There is a propensity in man as a result of the fall which tends toward evil, and some theologians would have said that the very bias to sin is criminal.⁽¹⁾ "The ploughing of the wicked is sin."

Edward Irving accepted this doctrine of original sin, as we have already seen. "Inveterate purpose of sinning! Not a habit, but a law; not an accident, but an essence; the very being, the very essence, the unalterable law of the creature"⁽²⁾ - this is original sin. Sin, therefore, is almost a necessary condition: "Our flesh, so long as it liveth, cannot cease from sin."⁽³⁾ Irving came very close to an "organic" view of sin, and yet it was just in this aspect of the matter that Irving made a real advance upon the old doctrine. What the Westminster divines meant perhaps but did not say was that human nature per se is not chargeable with sin, for it does not sin. Sin, said Irving, is the act of a person willing. The corruption, as a writer in the Morning Watch, explained

(1) Marcus Dods - "On the Incarnation of the Eternal Word" Chapter II. Irving refused to countenance a doctrine of original sin which extended guilt to every action of man. See pamphlet: Christ's Holiness in Flesh Page 116

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol. I Page (140) clxxiii

(3) Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses Vol. I Page (140) cxcii

for Irving, is not moral, and it would seem that Irving himself had two very different ideas of sin in mind when he wrote, "Sin, in a nature, is its disposition to lead the person away from God; sin, in a person, is the yielding thereto."⁽¹⁾ Had Irving made this difference explicit throughout his writings, he would have avoided the charge of heresy, and would have led the Church to that clearer conception of the doctrine to which his abortive efforts pointed.

Irving would apply this doctrine of original sin in the case of Christ in order to insure his real humanity. If Christ took human nature, it must be human nature under the fall. But what are the consequences of this hypothesis? It was on the answer to this question that Irving clashed with his opponents.

Irving declared that Christ's mortality was due to the fall. This was part of the plan, for, according to the Scottish Confession, God cannot suffer death; therefore he became man that he might undergo the punishment due for the fall. And Hooker had stated that Christ's body "wanted the gift of everlasting immunity from death -- till God gave it to be slain for sin".⁽²⁾ Irving therefore frankly

(1) Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature - Preface x

(2) Ecclesiastical Polity-Section V

declared that Christ died by the common property of all fallen flesh to die, and from that standpoint the cross was simply the proof of his mortality. Thus he found not only an explanation of Christ's death but also a rational connection⁽¹⁾ between his death and the expiation of sin.

Death is the punishment for sin, he reasoned; therefore Christ took the nature which was cursed with death because of sin in order that he might suffer the punishment of sin, namely, death, and thus do away with sin. This argument satisfied him because it went behind the arbitrary link between Christ's death and the propitiation of sin. As we see it now, it only pushed the matter back to another arbitrary point.

Irving's opponents immediately took him to task on this matter. They objected because it made Christ's death necessary. Christ died because he had to die. Dods in particular said that the Saviour's death was purely voluntary, else he was no Saviour at all. Such arguments, said Dods,

(1) Irving felt that the theory of imputation of sin was not sufficient. He wanted identification.

undermine the atonement. Irving's answer straddled the question: "Christ ever, in his manhood, acted voluntarily to suffer and to die, when he had come into the condition which made him capable of suffering and death. -- Die he must, bear our sins and carry our sorrows he must, when he was born of a woman; and meet all temptations he must, when he was made under the law, -- (yet) he could have stopped and ^{*}sisted every law, and unlocked every fastness of creation, and made impotent every elemental power."⁽¹⁾ In effect he made the voluntariness of Christ's death extra-temporal; it was voluntary only in the sense of a pre-incarnate resolve. Then in the same phrase Irving deserted his position and gave back divine powers to the God-man.

In one sense Irving had truth upon his side. Subsequent developments in the field of science have shown death to be the natural and inevitable portion of corporeal life. Death may be caused by sin, but it does not stand solely as the effect of sin. It has a natural and non-moral significance, and has no direct connection with any historic fall. If therefore Christ was incarnate, his body was of course subject to the laws of katabolism and death.

(1) "The Opinions circulated concerning Our Lord's Human Nature -- " Pages 48 and 49

* Irvingism

On the other hand we must safeguard the moral quality of the cross of Christ. It must ever be kept in mind that the cross finds its meaning not in the death of Christ but in the giving of the life. Death as such is necessary and not moral. But the giving of the life through all Christ's active ministry and voluntary submission to death for men is a matter of will, and therefore has moral and religious significance. The difference of opinion between Irving and his opponents might be resolved thus: Christ died freely, but his actual death was due to natural and necessary causes.

The great controversy, however, arose over the application of original sin to Christ. In the first place we must note a glaring inconsistency in Irving's statements on the subject. Original sin apart from the person of Christ meant to him all the Catechism put in that idea, guilt, want of righteousness, and corruption of nature. But when it came to be applied to Christ, original sin then stood only for guilt. And on that partial basis he argued that Christ had no original sin because he was not represented as a person in Adam and thus did not share his guilt. "All mankind, descending from Adam by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression." Christ came

by extraordinary generation, and therefore as a divine person he had no share in Adam's guilt. Yet it must be confessed that Irving was not always consistent in this inconsistency, and in his fervor to make real the humanity of Christ he sometimes spoke of the Saviour as being also the subject of guilt. "The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine" contains the following sentence which gives away entirely the above argument in "Christ's Holiness in Flesh": "If his human nature differed, by however little, from ours, in its alienation and guiltiness, then the work of reducing it into eternal harmony with God hath no bearing whatever upon our nature, with which it is not the same."⁽¹⁾

If Christ was not represented in Adam, how could he be made the victim in the other elements in the curse and original sin? Irving undermined his position when he forgot that the argument would hold for the full implications of the fall. For it was Irving's chief point that Christ's human nature had the corruptness of Adam's after the fall. By virtue of its origin in the womb of the Virgin it was "accursed in the loins of our first parents", and so was "fallen, sinful and under sentence of death",

bore the "weight of all sin, all devils, all corruptions", had the "consciousness of native and natural unholiness, alienation, and rebellion". By these and a multitude of similar quotations Irving's opponents had little trouble in convicting him of the charge that he made Christ guilty of original sin. Such was the judgment of the Scottish Church.

But Irving's opponents were scarcely more happy than he had been, in their solution of the problem of the relation between Christ and original sin. Most of them fell back on the Virgin Birth as the factor that cut the federal relation with Adam. Dods quoted Augustine as saying that Christ "took human nature without sin, in that purity in which it was in the state of innocence". In general they maintained that Christ took human nature as it was before the fall, or purified to the same condition by the Holy Ghost in the moment of conception. By such postulates they rid themselves of the danger of original sin in Christ, and at the same time set Christ off from the rest of men in the constitution of his person and the nature of his experience. They had secured Christ's sinlessness at the expense of his unity with men and by means that were scarcely moral.

The question was really in a state of deadlock: on the one hand, there was the precious, vital truth of Christ's oneness with us in person and consequently in experience; on the other hand, there was the equally important truth of the perfection of the character of the Master. Christ's sinlessness, said Irving, must be on a truly moral basis of real humanity. Christ's humanity, answered his opponents, must be in keeping with his spotless character.

Long before the nineteenth century the Church had felt the contradiction between the doctrine of the Incarnation and the doctrine of original sin. The facts of the case forced the Church to the admission that Christ was touched by the common infirmities which were results of the fall. But the Church made Christ free from all other participation in its curse by use of the blanket term, "ordinary generation". At best, such an adjustment was a poor make-shift to cover up inconsistencies of doctrine.

Even in the writings of the Apostles there is not the distinctness on this subject that might be desired. Christ is connected with the fact of sin, but it is hardly to be expected that these early writers

should give the exact relation. Christ was made
 "to be sin for us, who knew no sin", ⁽¹⁾ made "in
 the likeness of sinful flesh", and yet he "bore our
 sins in his body" as not his own. This ambiguity
 contributed to Irving's peculiar view, for in such
 an expression as Paul's, "in the likeness of sinful
 flesh", ⁽²⁾ he found, as he thought, complete con-
 :firmation for what he had established on other
 grounds, the sinfulness of Christ's human nature.
 Modern exegesis has supported Irving's contention
 that the phrase ἐν ὁμοιώματι does not emphasize
 in an implied way the unlikeness, but rather the
 similarity. σὰρξ ἁμαρτίας was a single unit to
 Paul - the flesh of ordinary men. Paul did not
 always define carefully between what was sin, and
 what was the cause of sin, or between what was
 purely ethical, and what was outside the sphere of
 the ethical. In many places he used σὰρξ in a
 perfectly natural sense, but in other places he
 saw in it the cause of sin, and therefore used it
 in a moral sense, "flesh of sin". It is not sur-
 :prising that this confusion should arise in the
 writings of a man who inveighed so strongly against
 the sins and lusts of the flesh. The flesh is the

(1) II Corinthians V 21 (King James Version)

(2) Romans VIII 3

occasion for many sins, but nothing would be more unbiblical than to say that flesh(matter) is inherently evil.

And in the wider moral judgment, the true norm of which must be the teachings of Jesus, flesh is not in itself considered "sinful". Where morality is concerned, flesh stands for those impulses, instincts and passions which offer resistance to the moral reason of man. But flesh as such is non-rational, and by that very fact is excluded from being judged moral or immoral. Moreover there is no voluntariness in such forces as flesh brings to bear upon the consciousness, while sin is essentially voluntary. These propensities are neutral in respect to moral values. "They are neither vicious nor virtuous, but the indifferent stone whence the saint or the sinner may be sculptured by the will."⁽¹⁾ They are the elementary animal basis of man's life, essential to physical existence and moral life. The error into which Paul and the Church fell lies in the confusion of sin with the material of sin.

Even when sin is defined in terms of the spiritual relation between God and man, "flesh" as such is not sin. It may operate contrary to the spiritual good of man, but it is by its very nature

(1) The Concept of Sin by F.R.Tennant D.D., B.Sc.
Cambridge 1912 Page 144

outside the relation of person with person. Even though its "wants" cause man to sin, it is not sinful.

Irving and his opponents borrowed Paul's psychology, and accepted the phrase, "sinful flesh". Irving was bolder than they were, and said that if this is the term for man's flesh, it can be applied to the incarnate Son of God. In his own experience Irving found that much of his temptation came from the promptings of his own "sinful flesh"; therefore, to insure a real humanity in Christ and consequently a full temptation experience, he thought of Christ as contending with the impulses of this "body of sin". But unconsciously Irving made the adjustment between the cause of sin and sin itself, for he stoutly maintained that Christ did no sin. He rejected the charge that he denied the sinlessness of Christ, and held that he put it on a real moral basis. His phrases indicate that whatever he meant by the word "sinful", it had no moral significance: "natural sinfulness", "native and natural unholiness, alienation and rebellion". To Irving's mind sinfulness in Christ's human nature constituted no moral stain upon the character of Christ.

This implicit adjustment became explicit when

Irving came under the influence of a more logical mind. The pamphlet, "The Doctrine held by the Church of Scotland concerning the Human Nature of Our Lord as stated in her Standards" (Edinburgh 1830) appeared without a name, but on good authority it is set down as the joint work of Thomas Carlyle, Advocate, and Irving. There appear in it the familiar ideas that we find elsewhere in the writing of Irving, and in much more logical form. Here human nature is given the non-moral meaning that Irving seems to have intended: "It (human nature) is so affected by the fall, that it lies under the curse, - and becomes sinful whenever, by ordinary generation, it is constituted into a person."⁽¹⁾ (Christ is still safe-guarded by the phrase, "ordinary generation".) Applied to Christ "this human nature, although not sinful, was not righteous in itself."⁽²⁾

The whole matter may be put briefly: Irving was at fault in his failure to use the correct terms. By "sinful" he meant "causing or tempting to sin". His most rabid opponents took "sinful" in its usual moral sense, and so they accused him of smirching the character of Christ. The more enlightened of his opponents recognized that he used "sinful" in a

(1) Proposition VI Page 18

(2) Page 25

limited sense, but they refused to keep to this limited meaning. To them, as to Irving, "sinful flesh" meant "fallen human nature", and they felt the evil connotation in this term.

The whole controversy showed the limitations of the doctrine of original sin, as held by the orthodox Church. Its unnatural elements appear in all their grotesqueness when the light of the person of Christ is brought to bear upon them. In other men it is impossible to say at all times when a sin is original with the man, or when it is the result of inherent evil propensities. But in the life of Christ there were no sins at all, according to the sacred records of the Church. Irving's opponents were right! Sin in any form had no place in the Saviour. But the argument can be turned back upon them and their unnatural doctrine of original sin. For the character of Christ without actual sin is the best index to the nature of man before actual sin. Christ felt no guilt such as the doctrine in question declares inherent in every man. Therefore the Church adjusted that doctrine to say that he

(1) Henry Drummond defined the term for Irving: "Sinful flesh is not the flesh of a sinner, but flesh which, asking gratification, tempts the wearer to sin." See "Candid Examination of the Controversy between Messrs. Irving, A. Thomson, and J. Haldane respecting the Human Nature of our Lord Jesus Christ" (London 1829) Page 32

avoided original sin by the Virgin Birth. Again - Christ had no corruption of nature as a result of an historic fall. Therefore the Church declared that this taint of nature appeared only in human persons. But Christ was fully a man, and if original sin were a true doctrine of man, he would never have asked for such favoring treatment. And why not also exempt him from the common infirmities which came by the fall? No one would dare to do that for fear of an unreal life of the Son of God on earth. To such a line of argument Irving's opponents would have replied that original sin is not of the essence of the nature, but a mere accident which is not natural; therefore it can be easily set aside in the case of Christ without the changing of the nature.

But all such quibbling is founded on a dual view of human nature, pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian. By their view Christ took human nature without original sin, as it was before the fall, that is, his flesh never suggested to his moral consciousness ends that were not in harmony with his mission, and there was no conflict between his impulses and his reason. The absurdity of the position is at once apparent, for it destroys the reality of Christ's moral life.

Irving then was right! His expression was imperfect, but he was feeling after the true idea. He meant by "fallen flesh" the organic cravings of the body, those involuntary impulses from beneath a man's consciousness which cry out for satisfaction. ⁽¹⁾ These natural instincts were branded by original sin as sinful or even criminal. Irving as a child of his time could not divorce himself from the old phraseology, and so the nearest approach he made to the true statement of the case was his description of Christ's flesh as "instinct with every form of sin". But when we define between sin and the material of sin, the case becomes plain: Christ as a man did have these physical cravings from his bodily nature. This truth Irving was ready to assert in the face of a doctrine of original sin which declared that they were evil. If Christ did not feel this conflict between flesh and spirit, his moral experience lacked the first essential of human likeness. To insure it, we will be ready to say what Irving himself

(1) The Morning Watch Vol. I No. II Page 242 quoted John of Damascus from Heylyn's Theologia Veterum: "We confess that Christ did take unto him all natural and blameless passions; for he assumed the whole man, and all that pertained to man, save sin. Natural and blameless passions are those which are not properly in our power ---." (Fide de Orthod. III 20)

never dared to say, that Christ was the subject of original sin. But we say this in the full assurance that original sin is not sin, it is not guilt (guilt attaches to us only from our voluntary action), it has but one claim to existence in our vocabulary as a poor title for those natural cravings which have no moral quality in themselves. Irving's own words may be made to carry in this connection a deeper meaning than perhaps even he intended: "Christ -- proved that sin was not the condition of man's nature but a voluntary departure from it."⁽¹⁾

Perhaps those "heathen philosophers" were nearer the truth than Haldane himself who referred to them in the derisive words of a Mr. Boston:

"The heathen philosophers allowed the disorder of the sensitive appetite to be innocent and harmless, till it pass to the supreme part of the soul, and induces it to deliberate or resolve upon moral actions. For they were ignorant of that original and intimate pollution that cleaves to human nature. And because our faculties are natural, they thought that the first motions to forbidden objects were natural desires, and not the irregularities of lust." (2)

The doctrine of original sin bears little correspondence with the nature of the ordinary sinning man or the character of the perfect man, Jesus Christ.

(1) Morning Watch Vol.VI "Jesus Our Ensample".

(2) Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ by J.A. Haldane - Edinburgh 1829
Page 24

4. Comparative Study. Irving's effort for a more real humanity in Christ has affinities with all similar movements in the history of the Christian Church. The Christ of the Gospels before the resurrection seems never to have raised a question as to the truly human quality of his being. But periodically in the first centuries after his ascension men wandered in their speculations from this solid, intelligible basis and they had to be recalled. The Apollinarian controversy served to emphasize the human mind of the Master. Nestorianism contained an element of truth in its insistence on a full humanity. The Eutychian position was condemned because it denied Christ's consubstantiality with men. The Monophysite and Monothelite controversies presented a serious danger for Christology because they challenged the reality of Christ's human nature and of his will as essential to that nature. And the same reality in terms of personality was the fighting point of Adoptionism. But the line of spiritual descent from these defenders of Christ's true humanity came to Irving in direct connection with the Reformed theologians who stood out distinctively in their zeal for the truth of Christ's likeness to us. Irving started where they started - the human life of Christ which was best known. "There

is nothing," wrote Irving, "that can be spoken of intelligibly but the human nature; and, of the divine nature, all that can be spoken is to place it out of the conditions of the sense, the categories of the understanding, and the forms of reason."⁽¹⁾ Of course the Reformers denied that Christ was guilty of original sin. Irving went one step farther than they did and he declared that Christ's humanity to be real must possess those natural cravings and desires which the doctrine of original sin included in the curse of Adam.

Irving has a place with all the defenders of the true humanity of Christ. Nor does he stand alone in trying to puzzle out the relation between Christ's human nature and the fall which was supposed to have brought ruin upon that nature. Of course the tendency to deification in the early Church gave no place to anything but perfect humanity in Christ, and scant place for that.⁽²⁾ But in the Apollinarian Controversy the Fathers realized that according to their current ideas complete manhood necessarily included sin in it. Therefore in order to avoid sin in Christ they argued that we must take away the human mind. .

The Nestorian position with its emphasis on

(1) Pamphlet: "The Opinions circulated concerning Our Lord's Human Nature tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith" - Edinburgh 1830 Page 36

(2) In "De Carne Christi" Tertullian devoted a chapter (16) as "An Answer for the Catholics, that the true flesh of Christ was not sinful".

the full humanity in Christ seems to have gone to the extreme of supporting Irving's position, for the anathema against Theodore of Mopsuestia given out by the Fifth General Council was based on his maintaining, among other things, that Christ "suffered trouble from the passions of the mind, and from the desires of the flesh".⁽¹⁾

The first direct conjunction of the human nature of Christ and the effect of the fall was in the ranks of the Monophysites in the sixth century. The doctrine that the flesh of Christ was real human flesh had been long established in a qualified way. At this time the Bishop of Antioch, Severus, came forth with the declaration that Christ's body before the resurrection was mortal and corruptible - this in support of an unchanged humanity. He and his followers were nicknamed phthartolatrists, worshippers of the corruptible. His opponents of course held to an incorruptible, immortal body in Christ. It will be readily seen with which party Irving with his idea of a "mortal" Christ was related. Yet this controversy touched only what may be called the non-moral results of the fall as related to Christ.

(1) Quoted from Dods in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor March 1830 Page 219

Adoptianism

In the last quarter of the eighth century there arose the Adoptian Controversy in which the Son of Man was declared to be directly affected by the fall. Augustine had taught that Christ on his human side was the adopted Son of God and the supreme example of prevenient grace.⁽¹⁾ And it was Augustinian Christology which was the basis and starting point of Adoptianism, advocated by Elipandus, Metropolitan of Toledo, and later by Felix, Bishop of Urgel, in Frankish Spain. Elipandus declared that human nature remained human in Christ, and that Christ was "the son adoptive in his humanity but not in his divinity".⁽²⁾ Felix took up this position and sought to form a clear idea of the method of adoption. He held that the Son of Man underwent two births, one by the Virgin and the other at baptism, one natural and the other spiritual. Therefore before the baptism Jesus was as other men, and he achieved Godhead only by adoption in this second birth.

"As the Son of Man, therefore, was subject to the different stages of divine grace arising from his election, he was also originally, though sinless, the 'old man' (vetus homo), and passed through the process of regeneration until he reached complete adoption - undergoing everything that and as we do. But we follow the Head, and it is only because he experienced this

(1) Adolf Harnack - "History of Dogma" Vol.V Page 129 ff. (translated from the third German edition by James Millar B.D. 1898)

(2) History of Dogma - Vol.V Pages 283,284

that he can be our redeemer and intercessor."⁽¹⁾

Irving himself would probably have rejected Adoptionism as heretical, and it must be confessed that there are obvious differences between the systems of Felix and Irving. (a) The latter steadily maintained that the person of Christ was the Second Person of the Trinity, and his idea of Christ's impersonal humanity would have fitted in with the statements of Alcuin, Felix's strongest opponent. Because the person of the Son of God was always united to the impersonal human nature, Irving and Alcuin could see no place for any human personality, dual personality of course being out of the question. (b) Irving also put the regeneration of Christ at the moment of conception, in contrast to Felix of Urgel who found the place for it, consistent with his system, at the hour of baptism. Felix left Christ in the unregenerate (yet, by "prevenient grace", sinless) state from birth to baptism. (c) Adoption, in the strict sense of the word, had no place in Irving's Christology because Christ was always God in his system. However in his last pamphlet, "Day of Pentecost or The Baptism

(1) History of Dogma - Vol.V Page 286

with the Holy Ghost", Irving's description of the relation between Christ and the Godhead has the flavor of Adoptionism. (See Chapter VI) Yet even there it is the Holy Ghost as the representative of the Father and not the person of the Son which is the medium of the new revelation. (d) There is also some difference to be noted in the purpose to be achieved by Christ in us. Felix sought for a similar adoption for all men - the purely religious interest. Irving, on the other hand, was interested also in the moral side, and he wanted a Christ who could give to men his own example and power for sin-conquering - of course with the final end of being acceptable to God.

But the similarities between Irving and the Adoptionists were even more fundamental. (a) The great motive was the same in both cases - to make man's salvation sure by solidarity with the Saviour. Adoption of believers is certain, said Felix, only if Christ adopted a man like other men and so passed through a truly human experience..We are redeemed only if Christ is our head, our oldest brother. Since he passed through the experience of adoption, we may have assurance of our own adoption. (1) Substitute the baptism

(1) History of Dogma - Vol.V Page 285

of the Holy Ghost for adoption, and the motives of Felix become very similar to those of Irving. Irving declared that Christ's "evenness" with us is the foundation of Christian truth, because "everything which is in the members must first be seen embodied in the Head, who is God's model of working, after which we are predestinated to be conformed".⁽¹⁾ (b) In both cases they met with opposition of a similar nature. Alcuin, Felix's accuser, described a humanity in Christ that was far superior to ours, and the human limitations which were seen in it were only illusory. Irving's opponents held to what they thought was a real human nature in Christ, but it was as different from ours as Adam before the fall was different from Adam after the fall. (c) In the rationale of the incarnation it is also possible to see marked similarities, if we take Irving's most extreme utterances. As we have noted, the person of the Son which was united to the human nature in the act of conception was fully quiescent, according to Irving. "In manhood, bare manhood, with no more than the naked implements of manhood",⁽²⁾ Christ did his work of obedience to the law, and in reward for this obedience received the power of the Father in the Holy Ghost. Is not this the method of adoptionism? (d) But this emphasis in both Felix and Irving laid their position open to the

(1) Pamphlet: "Day of Pentecost or The Baptism with the Holy Ghost" Page 16

(2) Op. cit. Page 17

possibility of a fallen human nature in Christ. Felix asserted this fallen quality of the whole Son of Man, while Irving with his idea of an impersonal humanity in Christ declared that only the human nature was fallen. Yet both men stripped the "fallenness" and corruption of its moral quality by maintaining at the same time that Christ was sinless. (e) It remains only to observe that the Church rejected the ideas of both Felix and Irving. Felix recanted. Irving was cast from the Church.

Antoinette Bourignon

To Irving's opponents we are indebted for the next subject of comparative study. They accused him of taking up the ancient heresy of Antoinette Bourignon which had been condemned by the General Assembly of 1701. The accusation was based on one of the items of the heresy outlined in the condemnation, the sinful corruption of Christ's human nature and the rebellion of his natural will to the will of God. The similarity is sufficient to warrant a brief mention.

Antoinette Bourignon was a mystic living in Belgium in the seventeenth century. In the course of her checkered career she developed a strange theology particularly concerning the person of Christ. With

the contemporary theology of her time she made Adam and the fall the starting point, normative for the whole system. In Adam all men were defiled and became reprobate, our whole nature becoming utterly vicious. Jesus Christ was the second Adam, possessed of a true body and a reasonable soul. There was in him "a certain spiritual sensibility"⁽¹⁾ against which he had to struggle although at all times he remained sinless. She denied the theory of substitution, saying that Christ did only what we have to do, for "He was the physician who prepares physic for our souls and drinks it Himself in our presence; but if we ourselves do not drink the physic it has no operation upon us". Christ stands to us as the Captain who goes before his soldiers, helping by encouragement, rather than by actual deed accomplished.

There are of course in her system other doctrines which have no bearing upon the subject at hand, such as the condition of the world at creation, and Adam's fecundity. Yet in some things there was a real similarity between Irving's views and those of the seventeenth century mystic. (Irving vigorously denied any relationship or similarity.) In the writings of Peter Poiret, disciple of Antionette and Cartesian philosopher,

(1) A.R. MacEwen D.D. - "Antoinette Bourignon, Quietist" 1910

the likeness appears very striking. Poirer wrote,
 "It behoved Christ, then to endure our miseries,
 infirmities, and temptations, to experience the
 violence and exuberancy, the bias and tendency of
 our corrupt nature, that he might resist and con-
 :quer all these, and animate us to do the like."⁽¹⁾

In the same connection he put the words of the
 fortieth Psalm in the mouth of Jesus, "'Innumerable
 evils have compassed me about, and mine iniquities
 (he does not mean any sinful acts that he had com-
 :mitted, for he had committed none; but the bents
 and inclinations of sinful and corrupt nature)
 have taken hold upon me.'" As we shall note in
 the next chapter, Irving also found confirmation
 in this Psalm for the experience of a corrupt and
 fallen nature in Christ.

It is, however, impossible to trace any
 direct connection between Irving and Antoinette
 Bourignon. Antoinette went only so far as redemption
 by example. Irving emphasized this value in Christ's
 work (Chapter V), but went on to what has been called
 "redemption by sample". (Chapter VI)

(1) Vol.IV Page 14 ff, quoted in David Brown's letter
 to a friend published in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor
 February and March 1833. David Brown thought that Irving
 never saw this passage.

Menken.

It would appear almost more than a coincidence that a doctrine of Christ's "sinful human nature" should have sprung up simultaneously in Germany and England. At the same time that Irving was calling the Church back to what he believed to be the true humanity of Christ, the one-time chief pastor of St. Martin's Church, Bremen, Doctor Gottfried Menken, arrived at practically the same conclusion from perhaps a slightly different angle of approach.

Menken, like Irving, did not come at the doctrine of the Incarnation from the calm, rationalistic contemplation of the person of Christ. Menken was a fervent believer with an emotional element in his words that was at the farthest extreme from rationalism. He accepted Scriptural language and figures at their face value, and was satisfied in explaining rather than in criticising. His genius seems to have been to complete the meaning of Church doctrine rather than to arrive at any new point of view.

In Menken's sight man is sinful and corrupt from the fall. Sin dwells in him as a principle of almost objective reality, yet without necessary guilt.

"Sinfulness and mortality belong necessarily to the life of the natural earthly manhood, to the characteristics of the family of Adam".⁽¹⁾

With this idea of flesh as practically equal to sin, Menken then sought to find how Christ could take flesh and still satisfy the Scriptural declarations which emphasized his sinlessness. Christ could not have taken Adam's flesh before the fall, sinless and immortal, for he would not then have been a "sharer with his brethren". Scripture rather declares that he came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" and that he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree".⁽²⁾ "Our sins in his body - what does that mean except human sin, sin belonging to human nature in as much as it was also in his body, either as he had a body of flesh, or as he with all Adam's children was in the form of sinful flesh."⁽³⁾ Christ was then a full Adamite, sinful and mortal. (It is interesting to note in this connection that Menken adopted the same attitude toward Christ's death as Irving: the voluntariness was extra-temporal. "His death had no more value than his birth, for he

(1) "Sundlichkeit und Sterblichkeit gehören nothwendig zu dem Wesen der natürlichen irdischen Menschheit, zu dem Eigenthüm-lichen der Adamsfamilie."

- Schriften III Page 333 ff.

(2) I Peter II 24

(3) Schriften III Page 333 ff.

thereby put on his body of death and flesh.") Christ's being born in such a condition laid the foundation for a truly human life of Christ on earth; his growth and intercourse with men were within human limits. Menken with Irving guarded against superhuman powers in Christ's life. Christ did his work in the strength of faith "without any other help' from God, without any help from God which each brave and believing man could not have had". Thus Menken would insure the relevancy of Christ's example for us today.

But this power of Christ's moral example was not the primary consideration with Menken, and in this matter he differed with Irving. Menken was chiefly concerned with Christ's relation to sin as a sin-offering. Irving made bare mention of Christ's work as an offering for sin. In Menken's sermons on the ninth and tenth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews the question is asked, How is the offering for sin or propitiation fulfilled in Christ? The answer to that question controlled his doctrine of the Incarnation, for there must be a connection between this great purpose of becoming a sin-offering and the means to its accomplishment - his human body. Hebrews X 5 supplied the transition from the idea of sacrifice to Christ's human nature: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me". Menken enlarged

upon it: "Thou hast prepared for me a body -- an ignominious body,- an earthly body of flesh, a body in which I am in the form of sinful flesh, a son of Adam, like to sinners on earth. In this body I can bring to Thee an offering which Thou dost want, and which none other can bring Thee (I Peter II 24), -- the sins of human nature, of which this body makes me⁽¹⁾ a sharer."

But metaphors do not always convey a single meaning. Menken connected Christ with the fact of sin, but how does Christ make the sin-offering? In one sense he "became the propitiating sin-offering of the world, in that he offered up and destroyed⁽²⁾ in his person the sinfulness of human nature". He propitiated sin by subduing it. In another sense Christ offered himself as a sin-offering on the cross, the one final sacrifice because sin itself in his body was offered. Yet an offering must be without blemish; therefore Christ had subdued all the sins of the flesh, and could present his body sinless. "He knew no sin before he came into the world, and after his birth from the virgin in this lowly life he knew no sin, and in his childhood and youth and

(1) Schriften III Page 378

(2) Schriften III Page 334

manhood until he bowed his head and died on the cross he knew no sin as we know it." ⁽¹⁾ It is evident that sin is regarded as a principle, for Christ had already expelled sin from his body before the sacrifice on the cross as a sin-offering.

The similarity between Menken and Irving lies in the elements with which they dealt rather than the use which was made of those elements. Both described man as corrupt from the fall, Christ as sinless in a sinful body. Both sought a more substantial connection between Christ and our sin than the old idea of imputation allowed, and in securing this, robbed original sin and corruption of the stain of moral guilt. Moreover in many places their argument runs parallel. And yet their difference of approach created a fundamental divergence between their conclusions. Irving found "sinful flesh" in Christ as a guarantee of a full temptation. Menken, defining temptation as sin, declared that Christ was not tempted as we are, that his temptation was only a proving. On the other hand, the sacrificial element which is of first importance to Menken, is in Irving reduced to merely

(1) Schriften III Page 332

a self-sacrifice of Christ's human will to the demands of his divine will.

Such divergence supports the silence of history in denying any direct bond between them. Irving probably knew the German language,⁽¹⁾ and at one place in his writings he referred to German theologians.⁽²⁾ But we have no evidence of any direct interchange of ideas.

5. Permanent Value for Irving in the Fact of the Incarnation. By force of controversy and because of the energy of his own genius Irving tended to overstress the fact of the Incarnation. The union of God and man is so essential that it must be preserved forever, and we may look forward to seeing the flesh of Christ in heaven. Mediation between God and man, and thus reconciliation are made to depend upon this conjunction, conceived in mechanical, if not almost physical, terms.

But this is to confuse the means with the end. The Incarnation was to serve as a medium of

(1) Irving lent Carlyle a German "Life of Frederick the Great". See D.A. Wilson's "Carlyle till Marriage" Page 174

(2) Temptation Sermons edited by G. Carlyle, M.A. Page 233

the divine revelation, and the means are to be exalted only because of the supreme glory of the end. But Irving said, It is not the kind of life ^ro~~k~~ the kind of death, but the life and the death that avails. Christ's life was a typical, not an individual, life, and Irving would put its primary redemptive power in the original resolve of the Son of God to become man. That resolve made, the life follows on human lines, yet by an almost automatic necessity. The difficulty with such reasoning is that it takes from the historic life of Christ its absolute quality, and pushes us back immediately on the fiat will of God. In this sense, Irving's soteriology stopped with the purpose of God to become man.

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Chapter V.

A Moral Christ.

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Chapter V.

A Moral Christ

The doctrine of a sinful, fallen humanity in Christ was to Irving the guarantee of a truly moral experience upon the part of the Saviour. Whenever he contemplated the opposing doctrine of a "changed nature" in the Master, he described the consequences almost wholly in moral terms. He desired above all things a moral Christ, a Saviour who remained close to the temptable human level. Only thus could the work of that Saviour be intelligible and so effective for men today. Without making the direct distinction himself Irving thought of Christ's work for men in two ways - as being a moral example himself, and as effecting a moral salvation for all in his own person.

1. The Moral Example of Christ. As we follow out Irving's conception of an ethical Christ, it would be well at the very outset to delimit the subject, to show what Irving did not seek. He did not seek for peccability in the Saviour, and we can therefore dismiss that ancient and troublesome question from our minds. His friend, the Reverend Hugh Baillie MacLean, who was influenced by Irving,

had this charge brought against him by the parish of Dreghorn, and another friend, Henry Drummond, openly asserted that peccability belonged to Christ's human nature. ⁽¹⁾ Dods thought that this was Irving's meaning in the use of the word "sinful". But Irving himself never held before his mind the possibility of Christ's sinning, for, he reasoned, Christ is the person of the second Member of the Trinity and cannot sin. ⁽²⁾ "Sin belongs only to a human person." Nor did it occur to him that such an abstraction might be essential to a real temptation in Christ.

Neither was it a question of the final state of Christ, either sinless or sinful. As we have seen, sinfulness in the human nature constituted for Irving no blot on the character of Christ. The "heal-all ⁽³⁾ tenet" that Christ did no sin was sufficient to make sure the sinlessness of the Master.

(1) "Deprive human nature of mortality and mutability, or peccability, it not only ceases to be human nature, but it ceases to be creature at all." - Candid Examination of the Controversy between Messrs. Irving, A. Thomson, and J. Haldane respecting the Human Nature of the Lord Jesus Christ - London 1829 Page 22

(2) The Doctrine held by the Church of Scotland concerning the Human Nature of our Lord as stated in her Standards - Edinburgh 1830 Page 26

(3) Cole's letter to Irving - London December 1827

Supplementary to this doctrine of perfect sinlessness is the lack of any idea of moral development or progress of purification in Irving's view of the character of Christ. "His constitution never changing; being in the embryo what it was in the man of stature", the only change was in "the development of its power and glory", ⁽¹⁾ and this was of a supernatural character. It might have been expected that, starting with a sinful humanity in Christ, Irving would go on to a development of the character in that Christ. But such was not the case; Jesus Christ to Irving had a static perfection and sinlessness showing no signs of natural growth. His Christ was truly tempted, but there was no progress of extermination of temptation.

It may be argued that Irving made frequent use of that passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews (II 10) which speaks of Christ being made "perfect through sufferings". But it must always be remembered that Irving's was an "applied" Christ, never considered apart from men's practical needs. Hence this perfecting was only in effective power as a brother to men. "The Captain of our salvation -- was made perfect through suffering, - not that in His proper

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
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nature He was ever affected with imperfection, but that, in order to be the Captain and Leader of men out of thralldom, it behoved Him to be brought in contact with their sympathies, to obtain their confidence ---." ⁽¹⁾

This working Gospel gives us a clue to what Irving did seek in all these utterances concerning a "sinful humanity". Above all else he wanted a Saviour intelligible to men in terms of a similar moral experience. Christ must stand "in the same position" as that in which we stand, he must be supported by the same powers as those upon which we may call, and therefore he must pass through a truly human and so truly moral experience. "He was obedient to the Law, in its letter and in its spirit; and he made the word of God his meditation, as we do; and he lived by faith upon it, as do all his people. He prayed and was strengthened by prayer, as we are: he was afflicted with all our afflictions, and tried with all our trials, and was sustained by the power of the Holy Ghost, even as we." ⁽²⁾ The "right virtue"

(1) Sermons on John the Baptist Page 98

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol.I Pages 152,153

of the Christ lies in his similarity to us; that similarity must be in moral experience; and moral experience, to Irving, consists in the conflict of temptation. Theoretically Irving sought for a similar basis of temptation in Christ, i.e. sinful flesh, as necessary to the end of a similar kind of holiness. In practical development the likeness of Christ to us in temptation became almost an end in itself.

(1. The Temptation of Christ.

From the first the temptation experience of Christ had a large place in Irving's mind. The Temptation Sermons (1823), five in number, laid a broad foundation for a real struggle in the Master between the good and the evil. "The Saviour was not a stock or stone, that these visions and this offer of things should pass before Him without power or impression.--- It was of the essence of His being to be touched by them, and moved with them, as another human being is." ⁽¹⁾ The temptability of the Master always remained for Irving a primary consideration. Later, when he came to the position of a fallen human nature in Christ, he declared that

(1) Page 242

temptability depended entirely on this fallen element in Christ's constitution. But Thomson and the rest of his opponents quickly caught him up in this error by saying that Adam before the fall was tempted. He who denies that Christ's human nature was fallen, does not therefore deny that Christ was temptable. Irving finally admitted that temptability was an "essential property" of human nature in any estate. (1)

The real issue was not in the fact of temptability, but in the sources of temptation in Christ. Irving argued for a Christ who had "this very sensitive nature of ours", open to temptation from "sinful flesh" within his own person, as well as from without through the channels of that flesh. He would be content with nothing less than a full moral sensitivity in the Saviour. The sympathy of Christ's temptation would fall short of the mark if he were not "tempted in all points". His opponents held that the temptations were from without and that the

(1) The Opinions circulated concerning Our Lord's Human Nature tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith. Page 21

sympathy of Christ's temptations had a sufficient range without such as arise from the proclivities of fallen flesh, which, they said, Christ did not have.

It must always be kept in mind that Irving did not consider temptation as necessarily sinful. To call this struggle against evil and for the good sin was to his mind a "perversion of language".⁽¹⁾ Hence he could describe Christ's temptations in the most vivid terms without endangering his sinless state. Within the person of the Redeemer the powers of Satan were in mortal conflict with the powers of God, and yet the struggle left no moral stain upon his character. Of course in the large definition of temptation Irving was essentially correct: the conflict of impulses is not sin, and the dice must not be loaded against a man by characterizing the issue before it appears.

The main content of this temptation experience in Christ was derived, by Irving's strange exegesis, from the Psalms. Early in his ministry Irving had discovered the universal sympathy which is contained in the

(1) Christ's Holiness in Flesh. Page 118

(1)
 Psalms. The same quality he sought in Christ, and it was but a step to follow the common interpretation of the day and apply these Psalms to Christ, perhaps because the same Spirit was in the psalmist and in Christ. Yet Irving had expressly condemned such confusion of Christ's experiences with those of the psalmist. In the introductory essay to Bishop Horne's Commentary on the Psalms Irving had written: "To apply any of the foul deeds or wicked experiences unto Christ, is a wonderful blindness which hath come over certain holy men in the church from their eagerness to find Christ everywhere in these consecrated songs." But this error was the trap into which he himself fell, and he boldly applied such Psalms as the twenty-second and the fortieth to "Christ personal". He found here a great thesaurus of religious and moral experience. Where the psalmist spoke of sins or iniquities, Irving attributed them to the nature which Christ took upon him. The expression, "Mine infirmities have taken hold of me; they are more than the hairs of mine head," (Psalm XL 12 - Irving's arrangement), is taken as ample proof that Christ had taken fallen human nature and its

(1) Thirty Sermons by the Rev. E. Irving, A.M. 1822-1825 London 1835. Page 218 "The Psalmist had trodden all the paths and passed through all trials, and had been triumphant over all enemies."

burden of sin. In the same Psalm it was Christ, and not the psalmist, who was brought out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay. This method of exegesis (1) was probably responsible for many of the unguarded words of Irving which connected Christ with sin as closely as the psalmist was connected. We cannot wonder that he was accused of making Christ a sinner.

If the Psalms supplied the content of Christ's temptation experience, Irving's own struggles determined the range and depth of the Saviour's trials. Fellowship with Christ was to Irving a fellowship in temptation, and therefore Christ's temptation must be of sufficiently broad scope to take in the experience of all men. Everything followed from this one postulate of a fellowship in temptation: Christ's flesh was sinful (to give the temptation a human basis), and Christ's path of life was as low as the lowest man's (to make his moral sympathy complete). For the sake of this "fellow-feeling", which (2) to Irving was "the most genuine mark of His disciples", Christ was made liable to the impulses of "fallen" flesh. For the same reason God was said to have brought Christ (3) "through the experience of the most abject sinner".

"There is not a sinner, be he who he may, that ever was brought into deep waters, but Christ was brought

(1) Dods, Drummond, Haldane, and Cole all quote the Psalms for Christ's experience.

(2) Sermons and Lectures, edited by G. Carlyle M.A.

"Temptation Sermons" - Page 222

(3) Homilies on Baptism (1828) Page 184

into deeper."⁽¹⁾ Christ, having passed through such a typically human experience, has now "the ever-present consciousness and sympathy of the conditions and trials of his members upon the earth", and we on our part as we go through the same scenes of trial can take heart in the knowledge that he suffered and now can sympathize with us.

Irving undoubtedly struck a true chord in the Christian life in his insistence on the fellowship of Christ in our struggles. We all take new courage when we realize that He also was tempted. Companionship in temptation lightens the burden of the trial. But it cannot be companionship with a temptation experience that is only sham, or that is limited to a narrow range of impulses. So Irving could say of Christ, "His divinity screened him not a jot."⁽²⁾ If it was a true temptation experience and if Christ's body was truly human, then Irving reasoned rightly in including the impulses of the flesh among the sources of Christ's temptation. As we have indicated in the previous chapter, our Lord had a body like ours with the possibility of impulses from the natural appetites. No doubt they

(1) The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature (1830) Page 97

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol.I Page 165

were sublimated and put to the very highest uses as in the case of many ordinary men; but their very presence must have held the potentiality of temptation for Christ. Regeneration, as Irving with a true sense for Christian experience declared, does not change the fleshly nature of men. Neither can Christ have been exempt from the involuntary stirrings of the body.

Taken in a literal sense Irving's position was correct. But as related to the full round of the Christian life his emphasis on the fleshly temptations of Jesus fell pitifully short. It is true that in the "Temptation Sermons" Irving laid great stress on the spiritual struggles of the Master. But in the later years of controversy the temptation of Christ resolved itself almost entirely into a struggle with the flesh. The part was substituted for the whole, and that part was probably the least important in the experience of Jesus. The impulses were there, but by sheer strength of character Jesus would have relegated them to the background, or turned their energies to his own holy purposes. And in this overemphasis Irving forgot the other, higher temptations which were more real to Jesus. It is a mean estimate of the Saviour's mind which fills it with physical desires and fleshly struggles. Irving

apparently saw no progress of temptation in the life of Christ, from the lower to the higher, no new trials with the broadening outlook. His treatment of Christ's temptations tends to be "thin" and hollow-sounding, a shell of assuring externals, but lacking in depth and richness of moral sympathy.

It is moreover to be questioned whether the sympathy of Christ can be deduced from an exact duplication of the sources of temptation in him and in us. This was Irving's thesis: Christ can sympathize only in what he has experienced. It did not occur to Irving that actual sin may lead to temptation which the sinless can never feel. By this measure of sympathy and "fellow-feeling" Christ would have to be tried by sin itself as well as by sinful flesh. The matter resolves itself into absurdity when we try to think of Jesus being tried by all the various causes of temptation in men! Does not the catholic quality of Christ's temptation depend rather on the conflict itself which he shares with us? After all it is the struggle which is distinctive of a temptation.

(2. The Sinlessness of Christ.)

Comradeship must give way to leadership, and the sympathy of Christ is only a stopping place on

the way to the perfection of his moral example. To Irving as to all Christians, Christ was without sin, and his sinlessness was as much an article of faith as his "consubstantiality of flesh with us".

The fact of that sinlessness was not a matter of dispute. As Henry Drummond put it, the real question was the "how" of it. Irving's opponents took the static view of that holiness and declared that it was inherent, perfect at the beginning as at the ending of that life. If it was not inherent, it was wrought all at once by the Holy Ghost in the moment of conception and maintained through the course of the life by the same power. On the contrary Irving argued that essential holiness is divine, a thing quite apart from human life. Starting from a basis of full kenosis and real humanity, he declared that Christ had to "swim" for this holiness in the face of temptation. "The sinlessness of Christ's flesh -- was a moral and not a physical act," the result of will and not of nature.

Again we must remind ourselves that Irving's chief concern was the needs of men in his own day. These men must be able to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and the holiness of the Master must be

on the moral level of the disciples. "In everything he was very man; and being very man begotten of the Spirit, he is to be imitated, yea, and to be followed, in the full faith of our being in everything made like unto him."⁽¹⁾ "Wherever you are without a model, there you have mysticism: and the only way not to have it, is to preach the person of Christ as the person of every Christian, and the life of Christ as the life of every Christian, and the being of Christ as the being of every Christian."⁽²⁾ Christ is then the "model and example", "the type or pattern of every Christian who should come after"⁽³⁾. In this respect he is the pioneer in the field of holiness, blazing the path before our steps, but only indicating the way over which we ourselves must pass. As he overcame, so must we.

This quality of imitability, so central to Irving's thinking, required of course a like basis of holiness in Christ and in us. So his flesh must be as ours, sinful and fallen; his temptation must be as ours, real and human and tinged with the quality of fleshliness; to the end that his righteousness may be, not a physical or metaphysical necessity, but a moral achievement as ours is. The purchase of his moral example upon us depends on

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses Vol. I Page 278

(2) Pages 279 and 280.

(3) The Last Days - July 1828

this equality. "It is not enough to constitute him our example, that he should be holy, but that he should be holy in our very circumstances, or rather in our very life."⁽¹⁾ Reading our experience back into that of Christ, we may say that Christ's righteousness was the product of will, resisting temptation, and making the whole man holy by the inner power of goodness. Holiness, as we know it, must come from the soul of a man, and must derive its merit from the very heat of the inner struggle.

As we look back upon the controversy on this head, the difference may be described as that between two ideals, the aesthetic and the ethical. The traditional view with all its devotion and worship conceived of Jesus as the perfect ideal of manhood, beautiful to look upon, and possessed of all virtues - the aesthetic ideal. Irving, on the other hand, accepting this final resultant of a holy Christ, nevertheless went back into the experience upon which that holiness rested, and declared that it was founded on a real moral conflict. His was an ethical ideal which embraced both the final product and the forces contributing to that result.

We can all feel the force of Irving's argument.

It is a very natural tendency, among those who revere Christ's name, to set his perfection off from our common sphere of moral action, and thus to cut the vital connection between his example and our imitation. But if we can see that his holiness was won by struggle and against the force of temptation such as we feel, we immediately cast our despair behind us and push on with swifter feet toward the goal of our calling in Jesus Christ. We prefer a temptable Christ to a beautiful Apollo.

Interwoven with a maze of other contradictory doctrines there was very clearly a doctrine of redemption by imitation. Yet it is also clear that in Irving's emphasis the disciples' condition was more controlling than the Master's example. Irving found the experience of temptation in his own life, and on that ground argued that it must likewise be found in the life of Christ. The conclusion was probably true, but the argument by which it was reached imperils the supremacy of the historic Christ. As Irving's words stand, it appears that he did not go much beyond the relation of similarity; and the demonstration of the applicability of Christ's example to us overshadowed the example itself. It was shown as a truly moral perfection which on that ground was capable of imitation, but we are left with a very poor and inadequate idea of the content of that perfection.

Even on his own premises Irving might have reached a much more profitable conclusion. He might have shown how Christ progressed from the immaturity of youth to the firm integrity of mature life, resisting temptation from every source, yet advancing with the more positive movement of character development - all this by analogy with ordinary life. As it was, Irving used all his free-flowing words to show that Christ's example is truly ours, because he was tempted in the flesh. Christ's sympathy was made to obscure his power to uplift.

2. The Moral Achievement of Christ. It is not to be supposed that the sequence of this exposition comes directly from Irving's writings. On the same pages that describe the ethical quality of Christ's example, we find the development of his idea of redemption. For that reason it must be confessed that there is a certain artificiality in the application of these categories to Irving's eager, but sometimes aimless argument.

Irving knew that, to be orthodox, he must have some definite theory of redemption. His church traditions demanded some estimate of the work of Christ of a more positive character than merely creating a

moral ideal for men to follow. And he himself, with characteristic energy, wanted to deal with the whole problem of sin and redemption in a vigorous and final way. He could not make the current theories of his day ring true: substitutionary atonement depended on imputation as its vital link, and imputation to Irving was a fiction; and the emotional element of evangelism warned him away from its sentimentalities. He therefore sought for his own interpretation.

A part of the difficulty may have been in the fact that Irving and contemporary orthodoxy had different religious foci. The Church built its theory of redemption about the cross of Christ, and frankly confessed that it could not see the full reasonableness of that cross. Irving, on the other hand, made religion the hand-maid of morality, and built his theory of redemption around the demands of the moral life. To be real to Irving, a theory of redemption must show its rational skeleton. He admitted that he could not see how the cross took away sin,⁽¹⁾ and he never fixed upon one way of regarding the cross. To be sure, he did include the cross and death of Christ in his system, but the reader feels that they are fitted into a plan

(1) Sermons and Lectures edited by Rev. G. Carlyle M.A.
Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 529

which is built on other lines.

The word "redemption" implies the counter-balancing of a negative, a change from one state to another state. If Irving had difficulty in understanding exactly the process of Christ's redeeming work, he could at least make a beginning in describing the state from which men are redeemed. (1) He knew that the work of Christ was "to put away sin", and the whole setting and history of sin was clear and definite to Irving, even if the plan of redemption was somewhat of a mystery. Hence he started from this 'piece de resistance', and in his treatment it became all-controlling and normative for the whole scheme of Christ's work. 'As sin came, so must it go', was the working principle.

It was an established fact that sin and the dominion of its patron, Satan, came through the disobedience of one man. The whole condition of the world turned on the moral integrity of Adam, and when he fell, all fell. And "the death of all men, with all death's precursors of sorrow and disease, are the consequence of Adam's one transgression." (2) The reasonableness of

(1) Lectures in the Dublin Rotunda 1829 Page 37

(2) Christ's Holiness in Flesh - Page 10

the fall of all men in one rested on what Irving called "the great mystery of mankind", namely unity of substance with distinctness of personality. Generic human nature is a unity, appearing in diverse persons. But the unity is of first importance, for the whole race of men can be dealt with en masse. What affects one part of Flesh affects the condition of all flesh. Hence all men fell in Adam as the Head, and Irving can say, "We are dead men through Adam; not by a fiction, but alas! by a sad reality."⁽¹⁾

With such dismal history of man's loss in the background, it is unavoidable that Christ's work should appear in the light of a great restoration. In the early years of his ministry Irving said,⁽²⁾ "Jesus hath recovered what Adam lost," and "Christ doth undo what the fall did."⁽³⁾ With the passage of the years he came to interpret Christ's whole work on almost an exact parallel with Adam's fall, but of course with reverse operation. Drummond expressed what Irving really held: "The whole force and power

(1) Christ's Holiness in Flesh - Page 98

(2) Thirty Sermons by the Rev. E. Irving A.M. (1822-1825)
London 1835 - Page 68

(3) Orations and Argument - Page 455

of the work of redemption, seems to consist exactly
 in the parallel between Adam and Christ."⁽¹⁾

Irving was not unorthodox in thus relating Christ and Adam. His opponent, Haldane, wrote in his "Refutation", "As all the children of the first Adam are partakers of his sinful nature, so all the children of the second Adam are partakers of his holy nature."⁽²⁾ Irving's friend, Vaughan, said, "The parallel is exact," and "Adam and Christ are set forth to us in direct contrast and opposition."⁽³⁾ Even if Irving did not derive this interpretation from contemporary theology, there was still ample opportunity to find it in his theological heritage. Of course the classical Scripture passage would be Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter V, where the parallel is suggested. But the influence of Milton is unmistakable in this connection. Milton's double epic by its very plan was based on the parallel of Adam and Christ; and his words definitely described Christ in terms of Adam. What was lost in the first was gained in the second. So in "Paradise Lost" the Father addresses the Son:

"Be thou in Adam's room,
"The head of all mankind, though Adam's son."

(1) Candid Examination of the Controversy between Messrs. Irving, A. Thomson, and J. Haldane respecting the Human Nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. London 1829 Pages 55 and 56.

(2) Page 28

(3) The Calvinistic Clergy Defended - Page 88

"As in him perish all men, so in thee,
 "As from a second root, shall be restored (1)
 "As many as are restored; without thee, none."

Moreover, the act of redemption was in Milton made parallel and opposite to the act of Adam's transgression and fall. "Paradise Regained" opened with the words:

"I who erewhile the happy Garden sung
 "By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
 "Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
 "By one man's firm obedience fully tried
 "Through all temptation, and the Tempter foiled
 "In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
 "And Eden raised in the waste Wilderness."

In general Milton looked upon salvation as a second great trial, a second struggle with Satan.

Irving was faithful to the general tone of Milton's theology, and in the following passage taken from the Temptation sermons(1823) he paid tribute to the appropriateness of Milton's conception: referring to "Paradise Regained" he wrote, "In which title he beautifully expresseth at once the character of Christ as the second Adam; the end of the strife for what was lost by the fall; the opposite party in the strife, he by whose arts paradise was made shipwreck of; and the success of the exploit, the foiling of the tempter,

(1) Book III line 285 ff.

and the teaching him how in human shape he had still
 one superior."⁽¹⁾ Even Irving's more mature views of
 redemption had a certain dramatic, even theatrical,
 quality which was quite in accord with a strong Miltonic
 influence.

Let us now see how Irving arranged Christ's
 work of redemption on parallel lines with Adam's fall.
 In the first place the principle of the unity of human
 nature was foundational to the whole plan of redemption.
 The totality was susceptible of a part. As in Adam all
 flesh was corrupted, so in Christ all flesh was purified.
 (Irving did not see that the analogy was inexact, for
 unity through generation is not necessarily unity through
 regeneration.)

Of this one substance Christ was the Head, as
 Adam had been its first head. Jesus stood as the
 publicus homo, the representative, the "boast" of man-
 :kind. "He was not acting the part of one man, but of
 mankind; he was warring the warfare and achieving the
 redemption, and accomplishing the glory of as many as
 should believe on his name."⁽²⁾ This representative
 character was assured by the virgin birth and the
resultant impersonal humanity. "To the end he might

(1) Page 201

(2) The Opinions circulated concerning Our Lord's Human
 Nature tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith.
 Edinburgh 1830 - Page 48

suffer for the kind, and not for individuals of the kind, he came not by ordinary generation; but the Holy Spirit did take up a portion from all the fallen substance before him -- at random and formed of it the body of Christ. So that, as the whole earth stood in Adam's body represented, with the fate of Adam's body implicated, in it to stand and fall and be redeemed; so likewise the whole substance of organized flesh and blood, living, and dead, and to live, stood represented in the body of Christ -- to stand or to fall according as this man newly constituted -- should stand or fall." ⁽¹⁾ If then, "in the flesh of Christ all flesh stood represented", that flesh must have been fallen flesh. To be truly representative the substance must be the same, and therefore "in the flesh of Christ all the infirmities, sin, and guilt, of all flesh was gathered into one" as its true representative. As far as flesh is concerned, Irving held a full identification of Christ with human nature. Whatever Christ accomplished in that condition can all "be placed to the account of mankind."

Christ was then the second Adam, "in all respects

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Pages (140) liv and (140) lv

the antitype of the first Adam".⁽¹⁾ His experience was to be interpreted in terms of Adam's. Adam was tempted, and the fate of the world hung on that temptation. Christ also was tempted, "and again there hangs upon one man, -- the whole hope of the earth."⁽²⁾ "The second Adam was put on his probation as a man", and "the great question was again brought to issue; and if he stand, - the great strife will be at an end -".⁽³⁾ It was a second probation of humanity, under circumstances far less favourable than at the first trial, because the second Adam "dwelt in creation as it is now, with all its ruin and temptations, with all its trials and manifold sorrows".⁽⁴⁾ And the chief figure was "obnoxious" to all its evil, both in the world and in his own flesh. In this connection it will be readily seen that Irving's idea of a "sinful humanity" in Christ was partly the outgrowth of this analogy with Adam's temptation.

Christ's great work then was to overcome
temptation, conquer sin and dispel the effects of sin

- (1) Dialogues on Prophecy published in 1827. Vol I.
Page 183. Irving was "Anastasius" in the record.
- (2) Sermons and Lectures edited by Rev. G. Carlyle M.A.
Temptation Sermons - Page 196
- (3) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page 104
- (4) Lectures in the Dublin Rotunda 1829 - Page 33

from human nature. He condemned sin in his own "sinful" flesh throughout his life. He presented his own body perfectly free from actual sin. During the whole course of his natural earthly life he "died to the flesh" and its sinful tendencies. His cross may be regarded as the "finishing stroke given to the life of the natural man", ⁽¹⁾ the culmination of a sacrifice to sin which extended over all his life. Just how the cross is a death to sin, Irving did not see fit to explain. But the death to sin was complete, as was demonstrated by Christ's being raised from the dead. Sin and its curse, Death, were overcome by virtue of Christ's sinless life.

But sin is merely an evidence of the power of Satan. Salvation for Irving was practically synonymous with dispossessing the devil of all that he had gained by the fall. Christ's temptation was therefore conceived as a gigantic conflict with the devil for the possession of the world. "He came into the conflict late, very late, in the day, when the

(1) David Brown's Letter to a Friend, published in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor - February and March 1833.

battle went hard against us; yet was he nothing daunted by the multitude of the slain and the overwhelming power of the enemy."⁽¹⁾ Irving credited that enemy with power to the extent of making him responsible for the death of Christ.

"Satan hath combined such power against him on the cross, that he prevailed to the extinction of life; to the separation of body and spirit; to the burial of his body in the earth, and its retention for three days in the prison of the tomb; to the drawing down of his soul into hell -- "⁽²⁾ Yet at the end of his ministry Christ could say that "during the whole of the fiery conflict, -- Satan had never been able to make a lodgment, or gain a hold in his flesh; - - though free to come in all his might, he had ever been repelled -- ."⁽³⁾ Even the great ally of Satan, Death, could not exercise dominion over him. In such a manner did this Miltonic "Queller of Satan" turn the tide of evil, and assure us of victory.

The positive aspect of this same truth is

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- (1) Morning Watch - Vol.VI Article:"Jesus Our Ensample".
 - (2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses -
Vol. I Page 182
 - (3) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses -
Vol. I Page (140) lxxv

expressed in Christ's perfect obedience to the will of God. There were two wills in him, the will of the flesh and the divine will. The will of the flesh was a rebellious will, but the will of the Son ever prevailed. Out of this possibility of internal strife he brought harmony, and in this harmony of the two diverse wills may be said to lie the redemption, the at-one-ment as Irving would put it.⁽¹⁾ He redeemed the human will from its bondage to nature, and he brought it into harmony with the will of God. Here again the death on the cross may be considered as of a piece with the rest of his life, the final, glorious instance of his perfect obedience to the Father's will.

The effectiveness of this redemptive work of Christ for all men follows immediately from Irving's premises. The bond of a common flesh between Christ and us makes his moral achievement ours. He stood on trial as our representative, and his victory over sin is our victory. As we inherit through natural generation the results of Adam's failure, so we derive, by virtue of our unity of flesh with Christ, the fruits

(1) The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature - Page 88

of his conquest. "As by Adam came the weakness of the flesh, so by Christ came deliverance from its weakness."⁽¹⁾

Christ's work was therefore representative for us. His conquest of sin, shown in his dying to the flesh, is our conquest because "thereby all flesh was crucified, the natural man crucified, and the body of sin destroyed". Christ's obedience to the Law, even to the point of undergoing the penalty of the curse, death, was a satisfaction to the Father for all man, and "the whole lump of fallen humanity"⁽²⁾ was thereby reconciled unto God. In a word - "what-
:ever in Christ's life, death, and resurrection was
wrought out, was there wrought out for all flesh."⁽³⁾

As Irving saw it, redemption worked out to the restoration of all of man and all of his environment. The will of man was redeemed from the thrall-
:dom of sin, and the whole spiritual man was invig-
:orated with the life of the Spirit. The body was restored to the moral health which it enjoyed before the fall. "What did Adam give us? A sin-possessing
flesh. What does the second Adam give us? A sin-

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses -
Vol. I Page (140) cxlv

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses -
Vol. I Page (140) i

(3) Christ's Holiness in Flesh - Page 98

dispossessing flesh; a flesh in which sin is
 (1) powerless." Elsewhere Irving declared that
 (2) redemption must have to do with both body and soul,
 for both are to have a part in the glory hereafter.

But the restoration from the fall must be complete, else God is not shown superior to the devil. The visible world fell with Adam, and the visible world, sun, moon, stars and earth, rose with Christ. Corruption came through Adam; incorruption was achieved through Christ's victory over death, "in the resurrection of that body which -- was the concentrated infirmity, mortality, and sinfulness of creation. In changing this, the Father changed all --". (3) "All life, and all life's tenement and (4) habitation, was now redeemed."

It may be objected here that this emphasis on the victory over sin through Christ neglects that view of Christ's work which regards it as propitiation. Irving realized that this mistake might be made, and he declared that Christ's work was inclusive of both. "This office of Redeemer consists of two parts, first, in redeeming us from the guilt, and, secondly, from

(1) Lectures in the Dublin Rotunda - Pages 38 and 39.

(2) Dialogues on Prophecy 1827 - Vol. I Page 103

(3) Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Pages 573 and 574

(4) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses -
 Vol. I Page (140) xxxvi

the power of sin; the one to justify, the other to
 sanctify." ⁽¹⁾ By virtue of his practical, moral temper,
 Irving made the second part of chief importance. Yet
 from the very first there was this note of propitiation
 running through his writings. One of the "Thirty
 Sermons" from the early London years (1822-1825) is
 entitled "Christ the Propitiation", and contains the
 following significant sentence: "The greatest of all
 blessings to the world is the forgiveness of their sins."
 The "Orations" echo the same evangelical sentiment: "His
 Son died to cleanse the conscience from the guilt of
 sin." ⁽²⁾ But the whole idea of the forgiveness of sins
 and the removal of the guilt and punishment remained
 for Irving to the end an echo of church doctrine. He
 wrote of such propitiation as of one established idea
 which could be dealt with as a whole. He seems never
 to have inquired into the rationale of such forgiveness,
 but he was content to describe this work of Christ as
 a "ransom" or "price" paid, or punishment exacted. On
 this head he differed from the orthodox churchmen only
 on his theory of, or substitute for, imputation: Christ
 took our sins by taking our sinful flesh. So he could
 bear our sins in his body on the tree and satisfy
God's wrath against sin. Yet Irving did not admit that

(1) Preliminary Discourse to the work of Ben Ezra - London
 1859(reprint) - Page 106

(2) Page 438

this explanation exhausted the whole content of Christ's redemption; the cross is "a ground of peace", but it is also, as he thought, "a ground of practical holiness".⁽¹⁾

The general theory of a "redemption by sample", as Professor A.B. Bruce has denominated it,⁽²⁾ was not original with Irving. It was the early patristic theory, although the Fathers did not go to the length of Irving in asserting that the sample had to be of a piece with fallen flesh. They merely said, Christ presented his own body as the first fruits of a redeemed humanity.

Schleiermacher has also been credited with a theory of redemption by sample, but it is almost absurd to seek any deeper connection between the great German theologian and Edward Irving. Unity with Christ was essential to both; but whereas Schleiermacher would unite men to the Saviour by a living, spiritual bond, Irving laid his greatest stress on the physical bond. The contrast with Schleiermacher serves only to bring^{out} the questionable ground of Irving's theory of redemption: it was on

(1) Christ's Holiness in Flesh - Page 97

(2) The Humiliation of Christ - Edinburgh 1889 - Page 46

a basis of flesh. Irving militated against the idea of an inherent holiness in Christ's flesh as being unethic⁽¹⁾al. But when he came to apply redemption, the outcome of the truly moral holiness of Christ, to the sinful state of humanity in general, he made non-moral flesh the link or medium of that moral redemption. His view reversed the usually accepted order and made the spiritual subservient to the fleshly. Is it possible that human nature could be operated on en masse through the medium of one portion, or that a spiritual gift could be given to all men through their bodies?

Gottfried Menken also held a theory of "redemption by sample". As we have indicated (Chapter IV), he approached the work of Christ from the idea of sacrifice. Yet in his treatise, "Die eherne Schlange",⁽²⁾ there is outlined a theory of redemption that follows Irving's in a number of respects. In his homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews Menken had made the distinction which we have noted in Irving, between the work of propitiation and the work of purification.⁽³⁾ Christ not only secured the forgiveness of sin for all men, but he drove sin itself out of man. He encountered Satan and

(1) It is to be noted here that Schleiermacher denied that in Christ's experience there was any moral conflict.

(2) Schriften - Vol.VI.

(3) Schriften - Vol.III Page 337

overcame him. He who crucified sin, crucified at the same time the old serpent. (cf. "the brazen serpent"). Death also was overcome with Satan. So far Irving and Menken had somewhat in common. The real difference appears in the scope of the power of Christ's death. Menken held that Christ did not offer for himself⁽¹⁾ because he had done no sin. He did not carry the identification of Christ with sinful men to the point of Christ's needing a sacrificial death on his own behalf. Irving did not make clear the completeness of Christ's identification with us (he was one with us in flesh and possession of the Holy Spirit, but he was not a sinner in the actual sense); yet he declared⁽²⁾ that Christ died for himself. The curse of death was passed upon him because of his sinful flesh. In this contention Irving was holding to the literal doctrine of the fall and its consequences: Christ's body was fallen flesh, and therefore he had to undergo the punishment of death for himself.

Menken's view would have the bulk of the sympathies of the Christian world. The Christian world generally says that Christ himself needed no

(1) Schriften VI Page 397

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses -
Vol. I Page 145

salvation. Our feeling for the moral rightness of things exempts the Master from our condemnation for sin. Yet Irving deserves some consideration for the very consistency with which he carried out his theory of redemption by sample. The "sample" must be wrought upon before the "whole lump" can be leavened.

But if with Irving and others we find more of the redeeming work and grace in the life of Christ, we also find that the fullest identification of Christ with us is quite compatible with his saving work. He grew in the knowledge of God and in the depth of saving love which he came to reveal to us. So in this more modern sense it can be said that Christ was himself the subject and the object of his own redeeming work. Of course this is quite a different conception of Christ's work than we see in Irving's interpretation. He found the essence of the redemption within the person of Christ as a self-purification or a reconciliation of the two wills within his own personality.

Orthodox critics have objected to this general view on the grounds that it left scant place for the death of Christ. Dods asked Irving, What is the purpose of Christ's death if the atonement is already effected

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 in the harmony of the two wills in Christ? Irving
 would have answered, Christ's death was only the
 continuation of the work of his life, the last
 mighty struggle with Satan, or the final instance
 of perfect obedience. The truth of the matter is
 that for Irving Christ's death was almost an after-
 :thought. As we have already noted, Christ's saving
 work really stopped with the temptations in the wil-
 :derness. If Paradise is regained by the conquest
 of sin in Christ's flesh or by the victory over the
 devil, (as in Milton's epic), we do not need to follow
 Christ through the three years of ministry to the
 cross. We can go one step farther and we can ask
 Irving, What is the purpose of Christ's ministry if,
 as you say, Christ's saving work was wrought out in the
 earlier years? It can be said in all fairness to
 Irving that the active ministry of Christ figured very
 little in his scheme. Those years between the temp-
 tation and the cross could have been left out without
 any great loss to Irving's theory of redemption.

In fact we can almost say that the historic
Christ was not the starting point of his theology at all.

(1) Edinburgh Christian Instructor - March 1830 Page 200

Christ was the second Adam, and the parallelism with our first parent was more controlling than the facts of history. Thus his rich life was to be interpreted merely as a second probation, a second great contest with Satan. But this is to describe an infinite quantity by its smallest figure. Christ's temptation was real, but it does scant justice to the other facts of his life to say that temptation and struggle with Satan were of the first importance. Whether or no we believe in an historic fall, we must think of Christ's work as more than a mere restoration of what was lost.

Irving furnishes a striking illustration of what has too long characterized Christian theology - an overemphasis on the negative elements of redemption. Satan, sin and the fall have controlled our thinking almost as much as Christ and the new life. Irving of course was extreme in this overemphasis, and yet in present-day theology we find these negative elements looming large. While today we do not speak of Christ as quelling Satan, we do lay chief stress on his power to deal with sin. But at all times the forgiveness of sin is only preparatory to the larger positive work of Christ in us.

We also think with Irving in terms of an easy

dualism. "It hath pleased God to set forth all truth
 by the positive and the negative method,"⁽¹⁾ wrote Irving,
 and all his pages announce the same system of opposites,
 sin and righteousness, the devil and Christ, the apostasy
 and the true church. It is easy to set forth the truth
 by this method, and it contributes to an easy, striking
 style of preaching. But the truth is not so simple. In
 the first place such dualism gives to the negative ele-
 :ments, sin, Satan and death, a real, positive value
 which they do not properly have. Sin is not spelled with
 a capital 'S' as though it were a vital force with a being
 and reality all its own. Satan can be no longer thought
 of as the evil deity that shares with God the dominion
 of the world. And death can be represented by no destroy-
 :ing angel. Moreover with evil as a principle or force
 opposite to righteousness, redemption necessarily becomes
 the counterbalancing of that evil, redemption from sin,
 neutral in its moral value, rather than redemption unto
 the life that is hid with God. Of course the sin of man
 must be dealt with, but redemption towers over and above
the eradication of sin, as the "sky-scraper" towers above

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
 Vol I Preface viii.

the piling which counteracts the sinking of the ground beneath it.

The same criticism may be levelled at Irving's treatment of Christ as our example. He showed that Christ was free from sin in a truly human way. We freely grant that the sinlessness was essential to Christ's moral example as well as to his redemptive vocation. But Christ's strongest energies were not directed to the task of overcoming sin and temptation. With the monumental task before him of revealing to men the eternal Father, their own sonship and the world-wide brotherhood, it is inconceivable that he should tarry in these vales of moral trial.

In a word Irving missed much of the spiritual quality of Christ's work and example. The moral contrasts, and the mechanical relations of flesh and sin and the fall, were too fascinating and too easily mastered. He pictured for us only a moral Christ.

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 1898

Chapter VI.

Christ and the Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit in Christ - - - - - Page 187
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Chapter VI.

Christ and the Holy Spirit

We have done a certain violence to the views of Irving concerning the person and work of Christ, because, for the sake of logical treatment, we have postponed to this section a full consideration of the place of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation and the Atonement. Irving used the activity of the Holy Spirit as the way out of many of his problems concerning Christ and his redemptive work. Many of his most extreme statements lose their radical character when the all-powerful coefficient of the Holy Spirit is added to them.

Even before the first publication of his doctrine of Christ's sinful humanity, Irving was emphasizing the importance of the Holy Spirit. In company with the true fleshly quality of our Lord's human nature the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was a neglected truth which Irving chose to champion. To his mind the work of the Spirit was one of the three essential points of the Christian religion, ⁽¹⁾ although, as he saw it, there was a woeful ignorance of the whole matter prevailing throughout the church at large. As we might expect.

(1) The Pulpit May 11, 1826 - Sermon for the benefit of the London Hibernian Society.

Irving carried this counter-emphasis to the extreme, made the revelation of the full Trinity an essential object in the Incarnation, made the baptism of the Spirit the proper distinction of the Christian Church, and generally reduced the Spirit's operations to a mechanical scheme.

1. The Holy Spirit in Christ. In the same sermon in which Irving enunciated the doctrine of the sinful humanity of Christ, there was explicit reference to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the body of that Christ. It is no hasty inference that the unusual stress laid on the work of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation paved the way for, if it did not in some measure cause, the "sinful flesh" idea. Certainly the large place attributed to the Spirit made Irving safe in giving such a dark character to the human nature. (The risk is not so great, if we are sure of the effectiveness of the antidote.)

Irving gave to the Third Person the chief animating power in the person of Christ, and considered Christ's life as an "action of the Holy Ghost in his
(1)
manhood". The extraordinary qualities of that person and that life are set down to the possession by the

(1) An Apology for the ancient Fulness and Purity of the Doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland - 1838

Holy Spirit. There were, said Irving, three manifestations of the energy of the Holy Spirit in Christ: (1) the period from the conception to the baptism, (2) the active ministry, (3) the resurrection and exaltation.⁽¹⁾ These periods represented three different stages or degrees of fullness of possession by the Spirit.

In true Scriptural fashion Irving made the Holy Spirit responsible for the miraculous conception of the Saviour. The Spirit served as the bond of union between the body of Christ and the person of the Son of God. Once the union was achieved, the Spirit continued to sustain the Christ, and it was the Spirit who enabled him perfectly to keep the law. Then as a reward for this perfect obedience he was baptized with the fuller presence of the Holy Spirit in John's baptism. Christ received this power not because he was God, "but because he was the first man who had kept man's charge".⁽²⁾

Christ then entered upon a new stage of the conflict with added powers. Hitherto he had lived a life under the law, and had fought against the flesh. Now he was called to a spiritual warfare, baptized with the Holy Spirit in fuller measure, set to live a life above the law. Irving would read the whole active

(1) Sermons and Lectures edited by Rev. G. Carlyle M.A.
Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 539

(2) Day of Pentecost, or Baptism with the Holy Ghost
July 1851 - Page 39

ministry, from the temptation in the wilderness to the offering on the cross, in terms of the Holy Spirit's power. ⁽¹⁾ "It was by the Spirit that he was led into temptation; and it was by the Spirit that the man Jesus Christ prevailed.-- And he preached by the Holy Spirit, which was upon him, and with which he had been anointed. And in the power of the Holy Spirit he went about doing good, and healing them that were possessed with the devil. And the Chief Shepherd of the sheep offered himself ⁽²⁾ by the eternal Spirit."

But the climax was yet to be! All before the resurrection was essentially a negative work, a death to the natural man: "Take Christ's natural life at its best, it was but holy mortal life, whose ⁽³⁾ consummation was in dying a spotless death." It was a general work for all mankind, a purifying of flesh generally. But in the resurrection all was changed. He did not merely come alive again, but he appeared in full possession of the Holy Spirit. Now in reward for his humiliation he entered upon the

(1) Irving was not always consistent in arranging the successive stages of Holy Spirit possession. In "Day of Pentecost" the period from birth to baptism was made almost devoid of Holy Spirit sustenance. See pages 16 and 17.

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses - Vol. I Page 154

(3) Day of Pentecost - Page 5

third stage, and assumed his highest dignity as
 "dealer-out of the Holy Ghost", ⁽¹⁾ the Dispenser
 of the Holy Spirit. This baptism, demonstrated
 on the Day of Pentecost, was "THE end unto which
 all the other work he wrought, of keeping the law,
 of condemning sin in the flesh, of openly triumph-
 :ing over devils in his cross, and over death in
 his resurrection were the means". ⁽²⁾ This is now
 the chief work of Christ - to baptize with the
 Holy Spirit out of the fullness of his own possession.

It is not difficult to see how this emphasis
 on the Holy Spirit fitted into the rest of his doc-
 :trine of the person and work of Christ. We have
 noted in the last chapter Irving's interpretation of
 Christ as an "ensample" for all men and a sample of
 all men. For the support of these functions of the
 Christ in their application to men, Irving had re-
 :course to the power of the Holy Spirit. As the
 Spirit was in Christ, so the Spirit will be in us.
 Here is to be found the true link between Christ's
 example and our imitation, between Christ's work of
 redemption and its saving power over us.

(1) The Last Days

(2) Day of Pentecost - Page 2

Irving's whole doctrine of the Headship of Christ was built upon the power of the Holy Spirit common to Christ and to us. In the Gospels he found support for this idea of a common Spirit, and Christian experience itself would reason back from the power of God in men's lives to the same power in Christ. The difference between Christ and men, then, lies only in the fullness of possession of the Holy Spirit, and Christ is truly our Head because we share with him in some degree the power of the Spirit. Irving's general expression, however, would reverse that relation: the Holy Spirit worked in him as the Head and works in us as the members. "Everything which is in the members must first be seen embodied in the Head, which is God's model of working, after which we are predestined to be conformed."⁽¹⁾

The passive voice expresses well the part of the Son and men generally in relation to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in all good works. The Son of God was therefore quiescent and passive as far as his divinity was concerned. It must be so, if Christ is to be for us "the model of the man baptized with the Holy Ghost, unto which all who afterwards

should be in like manner baptized, are to be conformed." (1)

The same general constitution must be in Christ as in us, if he is to be our example of the Holy Spirit's power. Therefore it is necessary "that the Son be very man, acting and thinking always within man's bounds, and that the Holy Spirit carry on the intercourse between the absolute Godhead of the Father and the Son, thus restricting himself to the bounds of manhood". (2) If the Holy Spirit were not active to mediate and to sanctify, there would result that impossible condition of a confusion of natures! But by the work of the Holy Spirit over the passive Son, the manhood was preserved distinct and entire, and Christ was truly our example and representative because he was truly a man.

The same logical requirement of Christ's example made necessary a sinful flesh in Christ as in us, upon which the Holy Spirit could work. If the sinfulness of Christ's humanity be denied, then, reasoned Irving, I have no assurance of the Holy Ghost's willingness to wrestle with wicked flesh in me, nor of his ability to overcome it in his own person. (3) The Spirit must find the same force of opposition in Christ and in us, or the action is not on the same moral level in both

(1) Day of Pentecost - Page 85
 (2) Day of Pentecost - Page 95
 (3) Morning Watch Vol.V page 433.

cases. There is nothing shocking, said Irving, in the Spirit's abiding and working in Christ's sinful flesh, for he comes into a similar relation with our flesh. Only thus could Christ's work be morally effective for us.

In other words, Christ was the prototype of the Holy Spirit's power over sinful flesh, the model of the Spirit's working in subduing, restraining, conquering the evil propensities of the fallen man-⁽¹⁾hood. The result of this process, holiness or sinlessness, was always so certain in the mind of Irving that he could not understand why his opponents objected to his application of the adjective "sinful" to Christ's humanity. Did not the Spirit always preserve Christ sinless in that flesh? And was not this the only method of attaining to that perfect state under the conditions of the fall - by the power of the Holy Spirit?

There is much sound doctrine in Irving's conception of the Holy Spirit in Christ. Certainly he followed in the wake of the reformed theologians in declaring that the union between the Son of God and man was mediated by the Holy Spirit. One of the

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page (140) lxxvii

results of this mediation, namely, a real humanity, was also quite in accord with reformed Christology. Moreover the idea of progress or development in the possession of the Holy Spirit, although it was rather mechanically conceived, is worthy of consideration. Irving's opponent, Dr. Marcus Dods, maintained that such development was inconceivable, that Christ was our Prophet, Priest and King from the beginning, independent of the successive baptisms of the Spirit. On the contrary, we in these last days are finding it absolutely essential that Christ's development in person, strength and effective power be a true development.

Our Christian logic of experience also supports Irving's contention that the divine Spirit in us is the same Spirit which animated Christ, and we find a very real assurance in believing that his perfection through a complete dependence on that Spirit is open to us through a like dependence.

Yet, in spite of these points of sound doctrine, we cannot go all the way with Irving in his description of the working of the Spirit in Christ. The delicate balance of moral responsibility is

somehow disturbed when Irving says so confidently, "The object seen in Christ is both the person of the Son and the work of the Spirit."⁽¹⁾ Our sense of the moral integrity of Christ is shaken at the bare statement that it was the Spirit which was the effective power in Christ's temptation, active ministry and sacrificial offering on the cross. In reading some sections of Irving's works we are made to look on Christ as almost an automaton, "Passive Humanity", made to act its part under the direction of an unseen powerful Spirit. And as we shall see in the third section of this chapter, Irving made the Spirit of greater practical importance than Christ himself. It is sufficient to remark here that, whatever may be the power of the Spirit in Christ or in us, its operation must be through the human personality and at all times veiled by the human.⁽²⁾

Part of the difficulty arose in Irving's hard-and-fast use of the concept, personality, as applied to deity. With such sure knowledge he spoke of the Holy Spirit as a person, distinct from the Son and the Father. The Spirit abode in the Son of man as something additional to the Second Person, exerting a superior and external control over that Person. Nat-

- (1) An Apology for the ancient Fulness and Purity of the Doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland - 1828 Page 30
 (2) "It is when we are most ourselves that we are nearest God." Inge: "Faith and Knowledge" Page 167 ff.

usually we rebel at the violation of the personality of the Saviour. We stand as responsible personalities ourselves, to be dealt with through the regular channels, human or divine. What we ask for ourselves we claim for Christ. In any view of Christ the inner core of being must be kept supreme, positively willing even in its submission to the will of God, and no power must come from God to overwhelm or destroy this integrity.

† In company with other theologians of his day Irving made the wrong approach to his Christology. He began with the results of dogma, the two natures and the Trinitarian background. Finally he arrived at a unity in Christ, but it was the conclusion from multiplicity and stood in constant danger of breaking up into its more basic elements. He ought to have started with the historic Christ as the one real unity which can never be broken. Then with the ancient theologians of the church he might have found in that Christ evidences of the elements which constituted that personality. In the unity itself he would have based Christ's example and representative work on a truer foundation. Christ is our example, not because the same Spirit was in him as in us, but because

Christ was found to be a man among men, sinless and therefore our example - yet one of us. And Christ's work for us must first of all rise out of the historic unity of his person.

It is moreover to be questioned whether we have any right to speak with final certainty of the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ or in us. Irving used the Spirit as a link which could join the two natures without confusion. We may well ask, Why, then, was there no confusion of nature between the Spirit and the manhood, such as he supposed would result from a direct union of the Son and manhood?

A further question comes to mind, Is the Spirit ever an object of knowledge, either in himself or in his work? Does not his dwelling place in the heart keep him forever from the eyes of the mind? The Spirit acts, we believe, directly upon the personality, and his forces lie beneath the level of consciousness. We may know the effects of his power as part of our lives, but by reason of his identification with the very powers of our own personalities we must remain agnostic of the real being and place of the Spirit. We therefore conclude that Irving was on doubtful ground when he fixed so definitely the place of the Spirit in the constitution of Christ.

2. The Holy Spirit in Men. It was Irving's oft repeated contention that the "putting forth of divine power which did redeem the flesh and blood of Christ from the power of sin -- did not end there". The same Spirit which wrought in him can work in us also. From the earliest sermon on record to the last we find this universal power of the Holy Spirit to be one of his main theses.

This doctrine of the power of the Holy Spirit in men supplied the positive element in Irving's theory of salvation. As we have noted in the last chapter, redemption by Christ was largely conceived in negative terms of overcoming the guilt and power of sin. But it appears that Irving did not make redemption and salvation synonymous. Redemption was the objective and negative side of salvation, a "deliverance from the bondage of death and corruption" (1) due to sin, effected once for all by the historic Christ. As a sample of the whole, Christ placed the whole world in a redeemed state, and in this sense all men are redeemed. "Christ's reconciliation and redemption is (?) as truly the common inheritance of the race, and will as truly be proved so by the resur-

(1) Exposition of the Book of Revelation - Page 1225

:rection of all, as sin is proved to be the common
 inheritance of the race, by the death of all."⁽¹⁾

In this same sense Irving could consistently support
 John Campbell of Row and say that Christ died for all
⁽²⁾
 men.

But it was farthest from Irving's temper to
 declare a universal salvation. With true Calvinistic
 vigor he maintained that a portion only of all men
 are saved. This selection of a part from the total
 comes about by reason of the fact that salvation in-
 :cludes both redemption and regeneration; and regen-
 :eration which is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 is not common to all. Redemption merely cleared the
 score of sin, leaving men without excuse, and we fall
 short of the fullness of salvation by believing simply
 on Christ's redemptive work. We must believe also in
 the power of the Holy Spirit for regeneration. This
 latter is a selective, an individual work, the out-
 :come of a personal relationship to God, and is summed
 up in the doctrine of election. "Redemption in Christ,
 and by Christ, is the objective part of religion; elec-

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
 Vol. I Page (140) lxxxvi

(2) Confession of Faith and Books of Discipline.clii.
 Elsewhere in the same work he defended Campbell.

:tion by the Father is the subjective part of it:
and these two should never be separated the one from
the other."⁽¹⁾

Irving therefore held that a doctrine of
election was essential. It delivered men"from the
lethargic corruption of aggregate masses".⁽²⁾ Election
is simply the personal relation of God to man, "that
particular operation of God's Spirit which one only
can partake of, by himself, and in himself".⁽³⁾
Irving rightly saw in election no mere selective idea,
but the full possession of men by the Holy Spirit,
and he could therefore say that "election, - - Christ's
Headship, - - and regeneration of the Holy Ghost, must
stand or fall together".⁽⁴⁾

Yet as far as election is selection, it must
be based on the arbitrary will of God. As far as men
are concerned, it is "unconditional, uncircumstantial,
unaccidental", and it is God's selecting love alone
that has made the difference between the saved and the
reprobate. In reverent admission of the limitations

(1) Exposition of the Book of Revelation - Page 1227

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page (140) xci

(3) Same - Vol. I Page (140) xcii

(4) Same - Vol. I Page (140) cix

of human knowledge Irving ought to have stopped there; but in a very mechanical vein he went on to say that the purpose of election was "to show God's sovereignty"!

The channel of working of this arbitrary election was Christ. Through the Spirit Christ was victorious over flesh, the world and the devil, and in reward the Father gave him power to communicate the secret of his victory, the Holy Spirit, to as many as the Father pleaseth. ⁽¹⁾ In this sense the Spirit may be regarded as the Spirit of Christ, ⁽²⁾ for the same Spirit wrought in him, the Head, as works in us, the members. So Christ is called the "Dealer-out" of the Holy Spirit.

The occasion for the realization of this election, or possession of the Spirit is to be found in the rite of baptism. Baptism, to Irving, meant not only the forgiveness of sins but also the assurance that the Spirit would be given. Thus baptism declared death to inherent and actual corruption, and life in the Spirit. Yet, to quote Irving, "No one may connect the Holy Spirit absolutely and necessarily with the administration of Baptism." ⁽³⁾ We can only

(1) "In Him(ascended Christ)' the whole fountain of the Holy Ghost' is stored for the use of mankind." Swete:"The Holy Spirit in the New Testament" Page 299

(2) "It is in the Person of His Spirit that the Incarnate Christ is Personally present within the spirit of each several man." Moberley:"Atonement and Personality" Page 194

(3) Sermons and Lectures - Homilies on Baptism - Page 151

hope in faith that the Spirit will come upon us and upon our children.

But if we are included in the number of the elect, then the Holy Spirit can do his work in us, a work equal in nature, if not in degree, to his work in Christ. In relation to the force of resistance, it may be said that "the work of the Spirit in the Church is a mightier work than in the incarnation of Christ", for "the flesh in Christ never⁽¹⁾ sinned", while "our flesh ever sinneth".

Irving was not always exact in his description⁽²⁾ of the work of the Spirit. In several places he described it as the addition of a spiritual faculty. He started from Paul's parallelism in the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, and concluded: "The spiritual man was not in being until Christ became the quickening Spirit, and gave the Spirit to bring men into the condition of new creatures, or a new creation. Those under the law were merely natural men, who understood not the things which God hath revealed unto us by the Spirit; yet they lived by faith." Adam then was not a spiritual creature and his soul had a "natural incapac-

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page (140) clxxviii

(2) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
Vol. I Page 95 and following.
Sermons and Lectures
Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 584

ity for receiving or knowing the things which the Spirit teacheth". It is sufficient to observe here that such a doctrine confuses the facts of revelation with the faculty of receiving those spiritual facts. No one will say that the prophets of the Old Testament were subnormal in their perception of spiritual facts. But we will not press the point. Irving himself called this idea a "door of thought" into which he did not enter.

But the chief work of the Spirit in men was conceived in clearer outlines: it is a repetition of the Holy Spirit's work in Christ. In the sermon for the Gospel Tract Society Irving enunciated the principle: the Holy Ghost does for the elect what he did for their great Head before. The same power works and the same results are to be expected.

The Holy Ghost enabled Christ to overcome, and by the same Spirit we are enabled to keep up the controversy against the world, the flesh and the devil. In other words, the Spirit sanctifies us as he did Christ, although the struggle endures till death, and the perfect result does not appear until the resurrec-

tion. The perseverance of the saints is then only the irresistibleness of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the outcome of the struggle fought under the power of the Holy Spirit is to be nothing short of Christ's holiness. Irving held very clearly to a doctrine of perfectionism. He cried anathema ~~on~~ on the doctrine that asserted that our nature is incapable of entire and perfect sanctification by the Spirit. The Spirit was given, he said, for complete and not for partial holiness. The Spirit is all-powerful, and can bring holiness out of our unholiness. By means of this doctrine of perfectionism Irving thought to meet a deficiency in the Reformation doctrine. But he was running directly into Pelagianism which denied, with Irving, that Christ was an exception in the moral order of things and so was driven to maintain that it is possible for other men to be sinless. (1)

In this connection we may note an apparent contradiction of doctrine. This work of sanctification has already been accomplished in Christ's redemption by sample. Christ purified the whole

(1) The Sinlessness of Jesus - Ullmanⁿ₁ - Page 233 footnote

lump, said Irving, in keeping his own person pure. We ask, What need is there that the Spirit should do again what has been accomplished once for all? As Bruce has observed, a theory of redemption by sample in itself gives no final footing, but when it condescends to explanation, it reduces itself to either a magical or an empirical redemption. Irving here seems to have gone into a modified empirical position with the Holy Spirit as the effective force.⁽¹⁾ That purification which was effected in the sinful flesh of Christ is repeated in our flesh by the same divine power.

But the work of the Spirit in Christ was not limited in Irving's view to mere sanctification; the Spirit was responsible for all the miraculous powers of Christ. Hence by this principle of a similar power of the Spirit in Christ and in us, Irving must admit the possibility of miraculous powers in men who are baptized with the Spirit. So he did not merely admit but he affirmed that men⁽²⁾ ought to have such powers. This position was attained only gradually. At first he limited the power of the Spirit in men to purely spiritual and inward affects. In a sermon from the first three

(1) The Humiliation of Christ - A.B. Bruce (Edinburgh 1889) Page 313 and following.

(2) So also A. Lewis Humphries - "The Holy Spirit in Faith and Experience."

years in London there is the following passage: "The witness of the Spirit that we are sensible of, consists not in the sensible, or even intellectual effects, and is possessed by every one who feels his fear waxing, and his love growing apace; who feels toward Christ a brother's affection in his breast constantly present, and toward the Father the obedience of a child, and toward the Holy Spirit the consolation and joy which the growing communion of truth begets in the soul."⁽¹⁾ But a man of Irving's temper could not remain content with this sane and purely spiritual view. He who argued before thousands a return to the apostolic methods of missionary enterprise, soon came to champion a return to the supernatural manifestations which accompanied that work. There is no gulf, he declared, between the times of Christ and the Apostles, and our days. The same Spirit worked in Christ as works in us, and the evidences must be the same. So, as early as 1828, Irving stated that the gift of the Holy Spirit includes both the inner gift of sanctification and the outer gift of power.⁽²⁾ In the Incarnation Sermons he wrote: "I believe, that we cast not devils out, and

(1) Thirty Sermons by the Rev. E. Irving, A.M. - Page 178

(2) Sermons and Lectures

Homilies on Baptism: Homily II.

heal not the sick, and do not the other parts of Christ's life, simply and truly, because we have not faith --." ⁽¹⁾ In pursuance of this belief Irving with others tried faith-healing, and on one occasion he vouched for the truth of a cure. But he reached the height of extravagance in this line when he entered heart and soul into the phenomena of the gift of tongues.

We cannot here go into detail concerning the outbreak of this gift in the National Scotch Church. It seems that for several months previous to the first appearance in the fall of 1831 Irving had held early morning prayermeetings to pray for the Church and the gifts of the Spirit. When in 1830 the gift of tongues appeared in Scotland, he sent a delegation to make inquiries. We cannot then wonder that under the influence of this expectation and constant suggestion a number of "tongues" finally did speak in Irving's own Church. Irving himself was never so blessed, but he submitted to their authority and remained a firm believer in their divine authenticity to the end of his life. One of those who was

(1) Vol. I Page (328) lvi

thus inspired by the Spirit, Baxter, finally realized his delusion, and his "Narrative of Facts" gives clear indication that it was a case of suggestion, a psychological phenomenon instead of a divine manifestation as Irving thought. Certainly the "tongues", as their words have been recorded, gave no new spiritual revelation. What they said was usually a wild, hysterical repetition of the words of the speaker of the hour.

Irving's theoretical position regarding these outward manifestations of the Spirit is not easily assailable. If, as the Book of Acts declares, the early Apostles had these gifts of healing and of speaking in unknown tongues after the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we have no grounds for saying that men today under the power of the same Spirit may not have like powers. Of course we have found that these powers do not appear in life today, but we have no right to say that they cannot appear. However, we can criticise Irving's over-abundant emphasis on these phenomena. It illustrates that tendency in his thinking to de-spiritualize religion. We lose sight of the primary blessings of God in us; the spiritual elements of power are obscured by these miracles in the natural sphere. The spiritual realities

based on the indwelling of the Divine may express themselves through material channels, but their fullness and depth refuse to be contained in such forms of expression.

In general we may offer the same criticism of Irving's idea of the Holy Spirit's power over us, as has already been made in connection with his idea of Christ: personality is obscured and almost lost. Here we must remember that Irving had little or no confidence in men (theoretically at least). "The power of the fallen nature is totally unable in itself to this (acceptance of redemption) or any other act of obedience or dutifulness toward God." The very "soil of a good and honest heart is produced by an operation of the Holy Spirit upon this our fallen nature ---". Hence Irving distrusted natural or human powers in men. His Calvinistic background would influence him in that direction, and his prophetic studies with their stress on the supernatural and cataclysmic would carry him still farther. The Holy Spirit must be everything and man nothing. "I believe", said Irving, "in no half measures, no cooperation between nature and grace, no mere helping of us to do this or to do that duty." "The work of

the Holy Spirit, in the regeneration of a fallen man, is not merely to help his faculties already existing, but to possess them all, and to expel from them the power of sin and Satan, and to renew the whole man after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. It is not a partial but a complete work -- ."⁽¹⁾ The gibberish of a "tongue" might well be taken as a symbol for Irving's idea of Spirit possession: man's best faculties are set at naught, overwhelmed by the power of the Spirit.

In fairness to Irving it must be said that he realized this objection to the Spirit's power in man, and in other places he guards these statements with reservations. In the first Homily in the work from which the last quotation was taken, he said, "The will in the renewed man doth not cease to be a will because now it is free, whereas formerly it was in bondage. It is not driven by the necessity of an almighty influence, but it is released from its bondage." Again, in the "Last Days" he wrote, "The gentleness and meekness of man, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, consisteth with the largest endowments of the

(1) Sermons and Lectures

Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Pages 546 - 550

mind, the most comprehensive purposes, the most energetic actions, the most patient sufferings." We can accept this view as the truer statement of Christian experience, for, however an immanent God may work, it is still our personalities that remain to be influenced. No matter what the influence, the "we" must be preserved to be the object and also the conscious subject of that influence.

A more serious objection to Irving's doctrine of the Spirit in men is that Christ himself is put in the background of the scheme of redemption. The Holy Spirit was in Irving's theory the chief agent in saving men. It was the Holy Spirit which made Christ the representative for all men, and which purified this portion of the whole lump. The same Spirit works in us to the same ends. In a word (Irving's words) "the great operative cause in the redemption of the creature is the Holy Spirit taking possession of it, and sanctifying or separating it from the wicked mass."⁽¹⁾ The death of Christ, said Irving, was only to show that the creature had no life in itself; and Christ redeems us rather by the

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
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gift of the Holy Spirit. Hence by this delegated salvation Irving could speak of "regeneration of the soul by the Holy Ghost; resurrection of the body by the Holy Ghost; redemption of the inheritance by the Holy Ghost".⁽¹⁾ All then is of the Holy Spirit!

The general tenor of Irving's interpretation of salvation was to displace Christ as a present, effective power as he was represented in ordinary evangelical theology, and to substitute the indwelling Holy Spirit. But his theory outran his training and Christian experience. To the end Christ remained central to Irving's religious feeling, "the only object of faith".

In defence of this practical emphasis on the present working of the Spirit in men, it may be observed that Irving was staying closer to the facts of common experience and to the factual reading of Christian history. Whatever power it is that works in men, it is recognized as at least a spiritual force related in some way to the God men worship. Evangelical mysticism has said that this is the ever-present Christ who has broken the bounds of history-

(1) The Church and State - Page 546

ical setting and become a universal spiritual power. Without doubt men do find the same moral and spiritual characteristics in this indwelling Spirit and in the historical Christ. But to identify the two is a secondary deduction which may or may not be accepted. Irving's interpretation is true to men's consciousness of the power of God in them and also to the reality of the historic Christ, without confusing historical fact with common experience.

3. Union with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

As we have noted above, there is a Christo-centric movement in Irving's doctrine of the Spirit in men. The Holy Spirit worketh in us "by directing our souls to Jesus, and enabling our every spiritual sense to feed on Jesus." Faith in the Saviour is the work of the Spirit, but Irving did not remain content with mere faith: "No faith on Christ is worthy of that name which doth not consubstantiate Him with us, and us with Him." (1) Nothing less than union with Christ satisfied Irving's religious cravings. To him union with Jesus was an essential part of faith - yes, more,

(1) Sermons and Lectures
Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 640

it was the very essence of applied redemption. Just as the Son proceeded to his redeeming work by union with human nature, so that redemption is conveyed to us by our union with Christ. But as the union in the incarnation was mediated by the Spirit, so in our redemption the union is wrought by the same Spirit. "The work of the Holy Ghost is to bring Christ's life, and to put it into you and me."⁽¹⁾ This is the chief function of the Spirit - to impart the body of Christ to us, and thereby to change us into the flesh and blood of Christ.

The doctrine of union with Christ was largely developed in the sermons on the Lord's Supper. There the Lord's Supper is called the partaking of the body of Christ. In the elements is to be found the broken body of the Saviour: "Christ's body and blood are really and truly present therein, and really and truly handled, partaken and appropriated by every believer, so as that they dwell in Him, and He in them, even as the Father dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in the Father."⁽²⁾

(1) Lectures in the Dublin Rotunda - Page 44

(2) Page 639

But Irving did not hold a doctrine of transubstantiation such as this passage might indicate. The reality expressed in the elements of the Supper is the true manhood of Christ. The union, nevertheless, with Christ's human nature is so complete as "to impart unto the inward man of faith those very self-same properties, and qualities, and thoughts, and acts, and words, and sufferings, and rejoicings, which belong unto Christ as He is the Son of man". Perhaps the most accurate word for this uncertain reality would be spiritual transubstantiation.

When Irving came to describe the method of this union, he was very careful to make it clear that it was not by a fusion of personalities. Such a method would make men to taste Christ's Godhead, and that was unthinkable. The true relation of Christ, the Head, and the believer is "union in distinctness", "union, beyond all unions close, yet in distinctness and separation impassable". Irving found that this remarkable relation was possible because, he said, we are united only to the body of Christ, and not to his person. "The redeemed

creatures are only members of the body of Christ."⁽¹⁾

Whatever connection there may be with the Saviour's person comes through his body, to which both Christ and the believer are united.

Later, in the sermons on the Lord's Supper, Irving advanced upon this idea, and declared that we partake of the humanity of Christ, that is, the sameness of substance with Christ. Consistent with this variation the Lord's Supper was made to symbolize
(2)
"the subsistence of Christ in flesh and blood".

Union then was reduced to mere likeness of condition in life; and it follows necessarily that the similarity must be between our estate and the estate of Christ before the resurrection, "flesh and blood subsistence". Human nature is the common ground of meeting.

It is evident from what has been said that Irving's description of this union between the believer and Christ is not clear-cut and distinct. The idea must include more than mere sameness of physical substance, if it is to mean anything more than natural human relationship. This additional factor appears

(1) Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses
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(2) Page 543

in such passages as the following:

"As He(Christ) and the Father are one substance in the Godhead, yet different persons, so are believers and Christ one substance in the holy manhood, though different persons. And as the unity of the substance of the Father and the Son in the Godhead is maintained and carried on by the intercommunion or as the old divines called it, the vinculum of the Holy Ghost, so is the union of substance between the manhood and that of all His members preserved through the operation and circulation of the Holy Spirit descending from the head to the utmost extremity of the body ---. (1)

Here we find the central idea of all his writing about union: the same Spirit is in both the believer and Christ. "The Son is not personally united to the elect; but the Holy Ghost personally doth dwell in them, as He also dwelleth in the body of Christ." (2)

Yet, in the same passage, using a mystical form of logic Irving declared that union with the Holy Ghost equalled union with the human nature of Christ: Christ "sendeth forth his human nature, the Holy Ghost, of whose substance His human nature is, as it were, the containing vessel - - into and upon the elected people of God, who thereupon become members of Christ's body ---." Only by this strange identification of body and informing Spirit could Irving say that the believer is united unto Christ's

(1) Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 630

(2) Same - Page 536

body. Perhaps in this strange conjunction we see a reflection of the mysticism of the Scottish Confession⁽¹⁾ struggling with a more spiritual idea of union.

The gist of the matter is that we are one with Christ because the same Spirit works in both human natures. "When Christ is said to impart to us His flesh and blood, and we are said to receive the same, it is verily and truly declared that we receive that energy of the Holy Ghost which put itself forth in His holy life and in His resurrection from the dead."⁽²⁾ The practical aspect of this truth is that by this union our flesh is open to the same temptations as Christ's, and has the same power within it, namely, the Holy Spirit, to sanctify and redeem. In this

(1) "On the Sacraments -- the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's table, do so eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus, that He remaineth in them, and they in Him; yea, they are so made flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bones, that as the eternal Godhead hath given to the flesh of Christ Jesus (which of its own nature was mortal and corruptible) life and immortality; so doth Christ Jesus His flesh and blood, eaten and drunken by us, give unto us the same prerogatives --." Article 21

(2) Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 538

rather remote sense "the flesh and blood of our human nature becometh changed into the flesh and blood of Christ's human nature", ⁽¹⁾ for in receiving the Holy Spirit we are brought into the same condition of existence.

The possibility of this union with Christ through the Spirit lay in the large place Irving gave to the Spirit in the Incarnation. The Spirit, as we have seen, was not merely the medium of the Incarnation of the Son, but came to usurp very largely the personal factor in the Christ. So there is little or no difference between union with the Spirit and union with the Son. Christ "useth the Holy Ghost as his own Spirit, which he sendeth forth into as many as believe in him, and straight-
:way they are taken up into oneness with himself --". ⁽²⁾

The distinction between the Son and the Spirit becomes one of prime importance, when we seek to determine the object of this mystical faith. If we are one with Christ only in the sense that we have the Holy Spirit which worked in Him.

(1) Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 624

(2) Sermon: "On the Unity of Christ and his Members".
December 23, 1832.

then the candid Christian will direct his faith to the Holy Spirit. Even when mystical union is not in question, the believer would see in Irving's description of Christ a manifestation of the Spirit's power rather than a revelation of the Father in the Son. The general tendency of Irving's thinking is, in fact, to make the Holy Spirit the object of faith. "My flesh, saith He(Christ), that which ye see and handle, is of no avail to give ye life; -- but know that by reason of the Holy Ghost who lodgeth in this flesh of mine, and will not separate Himself from thence forever, is the life quickened, and to Him who now is mine, and from me, and by me, proceedeth forth, do you direct your faith."⁽¹⁾ Union with Christ through the Holy Spirit was one of the great objects of Irving's preaching; but if we follow his teaching literally, we may be content to stop in the channel of connection in the Spirit before we have reached unto the Christ.

It is clear that Irving belonged to that age of Christian thinking which interpreted union-with Christ in terms of substance. His idea of a flesh

(1) Homilies on the Lord's Supper - Page 623

union was so materialistic as to suggest to his own mind that ancient question of the ubiquity of Christ's body. He made an advance toward a more spiritual view when he found the bond of union in the Spirit common to both. The union was thus by an infiltration of being.

Irving's strong emphasis on substantial union stands in sharp contrast with the modern idea of union as an ethical and personal relationship. Of course it is true that the believer finds the way open to this oneness with Christ through the likeness of nature and conditions of life. But this similarity of substance and even the common indwelling of the Spirit are only the foundations for the truly moral and spiritual relationship.

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Chapter VII.

Theological Summary and Criticism

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Projection of Christ into the world
of His Own Time

Religion of Sympathy

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The experience of the individual must
be significant.

That experience must control in the
understanding of the facts of redemption.

The effective power of Christ over the
world of men is to be found in the mind
and will and soul of the Saviour.

Chapter VII.

Theological Summary and Criticism

In writing this detailed analysis of the theology of Edward Irving we cannot hope to have done justice to all that he spoke and wrote. Much less can we expect to have been fair at all times to the mind of the Caledonian preacher. The barrier of time, his formal style of writing and our own limitations have risen up to make us wonder whether after all we have been able to catch his real meaning.

Even if we have mistaken his theology in the minor details, we can at least see its general direction and trend. In common with all sincere young preachers Irving had one great purpose - to bring his Gospel down to date. For one of such a vigorous spirit this purpose meant to make real in his own day the great Gospel forces. A weak sham Gospel was unthinkable to this "Messenger of Truth in an Age of Shams".⁽¹⁾

Since Christ was the center of his Gospel, this high purpose of modernizing his Gospel became in that measure a projection of that Christ into the world of his own day. Irving came almost unconsciously to bring Christ "down to date" by bringing him into

(1) Carlyle - Fraser's Magazine - January 1835

his own experience. Irving saw his Christ through the colors of his own religious life, and the high lights of Irving's experience became in turn the important elements in his picture of the experience of Christ.

This purpose of making Christ real to his own day by describing that Christ in the colors of his own inner life was reinforced by another strong tendency in the religious experience of Irving. Irving's religion might be called a religion of sympathy. His spiritual struggles made him cry out for a Christ who could speak comfort and strength out of a common feeling with all our infirmities. So Irving gave to Christ what he thought was a truly human basis for temptation and a true moral experience of temptation within the bounds of sinlessness. Of course this broad range of moral experience brought him dangerously near to the awful gulf of sin in Christ - so his contemporaries thought for whom mere naturalness was almost sinful. Irving's carelessness with words only made the situation worse.

The same emphasis upon a modern Gospel is to be seen in his stress on the place and power of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit was to his mind the link, not only in the Godhead, but also between Christ and men in all ages. The historical connection holds Christ to his time, but the Spirit may be considered as above the limitations

of time and place. Hence a modern Gospel must be a Holy Ghost Gospel.

This tendency in the direction of a modern Gospel in terms of the Spirit's power was reinforced by Irving's despair of the ordinary human forces of the time. To his mind the world was on the downgrade, and judgment was at hand. In such a dire situation his only resort was to supernaturalism; and supernaturalism to the Trinitarian mind can mean only one thing - reliance on the Holy Spirit.

As we have seen, Irving's faith carried him to the extreme in this matter, and he looked for a recurrence of all the evidences of the power of the Holy Spirit. Surely to see the miracles and the speaking with tongues of apostolic times in common-place Britain of the nineteenth century was to have Gospel forces brought down to date.

Yet it must be born in mind that with all Irving's desire for a modern Gospel his was not the type of mind to set forth that Gospel in a new dress. He found ready to his hand the traditional method of describing the working of the Gospel forces. Christ's achievement in man's behalf was conceived in a priestly setting as the work of one for all - one individual through the operation of the single lever of one life

lifting the whole mass of humanity. This "One-for-all" element in Christ's work was incorporated in Irving's system as a redemption by sample, as we have already noted. But such an extra-temporal expedient was in contradiction to the tendency of Irving toward a present manifestation of the power of God in salvation. If salvation has been wrought for man "once for all time", what need is there that men should have manifest in their lives the power which has already achieved that redemption? Irving's contradictions only serve to make clear the insufficiency of a mechanical conception of Christ's work as an external operation on the mass of humanity "once for all time".

We do no injustice to Irving in saying that he was the preacher rather than the scholar. We do therefore an injustice to him in taking his words so seriously. He wrote in the heat of swift composition, and his words will not always bear such a close scrutiny as we have given them. Yet out of such a study we emerge with a clearer vision of some of the great guiding stars in our thinking about Christ and his work. Atleast Irving can warn us of some hidden dangers. And our own reactions to the high points of Irving's view may be significant. Some of them follow.

1. Whatever may be our thought about Christ and his work, we must never overlook the importance of the individual as a self-respecting unit. Irving accepted the mass element in contemporary soteriology, but he was too consistent with his own individuality to remain consistent with this theory of salvation. Our own experience because it is our own forever precludes any external mass action upon it. Christ's emphasis on the worth of the individual indicates that he would not violate the sovereignty of personal experience by any wholesale redemption. In other words, by any plan of salvation the experience of the individual must be significant.

2. Moreover, that experience must control in the understanding of the facts of redemption. Irving's experience controlled in large measure. The life of Christ is intelligible to us only in terms of our own experience of life; for while we may grant a direct action upon us from divine sources, we must remain forever alone on the plane of this intelligible world - lonely souls bound up in the compass of our own experience. Confined to the coasts of our own consciousness we can understand what passes on-the high seas of life only by what we have seen at our own shores. With the quick certainty of the ancient theologian Irving

asserted absolute deity of Christ; but in his practical delineation of the character of Christ we saw little place for the divine personality. Within these limits of personal experience we understand personality, and our only opportunity for identifying deity comes as we see personality pass beyond the limits of our experience of personality. That there was in the case of Jesus this breaking through the limits of mere personality in its human sense, which is to us the mark of deity, may be reasonably clear. But we arrive at that conclusion, not from above as an absolute statement founded on the certainty of divine pre-existence, but from the level of our acquaintance with life as we find it exemplified in ordinary personality.

Likewise, what took place in the experience of Jesus is intelligible to us in the light of our own experience. From the clouds of theoretical speculation Irving descended to the true level of life when he declared a real humanity to be the basis of a truly moral experience in Christ. If the promptings of the natural man are sources of

temptation in us, then Christ must have suffered the same promptings out of his own flesh. But we do well not to confine all our attention to this lowest of the elements of a moral experience, for Christ's experience was at the very least upon the highest level of living as we know it. Its moral leverage upon us comes both of the common experience which we share with him and of the transcendent experience to which we aspire.

In a word, the forces that were resident in Jesus Christ must be akin to those which we find in our own lives. Otherwise Christ does not belong to our sphere. The physical forces must be the same, as Irving so violently contended; the mental powers must act in a human way, if our minds are to be reached; and if there be divine energy in Christ, it can differ from the divine energy we feel in our hearts, only in degree and not in kind. While Irving started with a pre-existent Christ, he nevertheless placed chief emphasis on the endowment of the Holy Spirit as the source of Christ's power. Of course he carried this emphasis to the extreme and neglected all other natural powers in that Christ. But it was a wholesome movement to

bring the forces inherent in the Saviour back into the realm of our human experience. An over-estimate of the person of Christ appears to be more disastrous than an under-estimate, for the latter at the very least brings Christ very close to our lives with all their need, while the former cuts the necessary connection with our experience.

3. In view of Irving's plan of salvation, What, shall we say, is the saving power of Christ over us? It is but reasonable to believe that it should act upon the highest in man, and not upon the lowest. If man is worthy of salvation at all, his best capabilities must be the point of contact. This demand of reason requires that the saving merit of Christ be on the intelligible and spiritual level, rising in the mind and will and soul of Jesus and not in any mechanical action. The miracles which Irving loved to dwell upon are excess material in an estimate of the efficient power of Christ over us at the present stage of our knowledge of the powers of personality. The question of their truth or their falsity does not affect the saving power of Jesus over our lives. By

this criterion, the death of Christ also has no power over us today apart from his own resolve within himself to remain faithful to his mission. Its merit is thus derived and not inherent.

Positively stated, the efficient power of Christ over the world of men is to be found in the mind and will and soul of the Saviour. In his own person Christ is the Saviour. If there is any atonement, it takes place in the soul of the Master and not in any external act of incarnation or sacrifice on the cross. His message to the minds of men is a vital part of his saving power. His moral vigor with its appeal to the wills of men has power in it to save. He is our salvation.

We in turn are to expect the saving effect of that power to come to us, not as something super-imposed upon us from above, wrought for us by a paternal God, but as the intelligible influence of a great personality whose limits press hard upon if they do not surpass the bounds of personality as we know it. Our response to this personality is a heightening of our present powers, or the influence

is degrading and not uplifting. The Holy Spirit may have a part in the total effect, but he works through the mind of man to the enlarging of his powers. There may be other benefits from our faith in Christ, but they come without our knowledge and we cannot speak dogmatically concerning them. If Jesus saves us at all, it must be by his revelation of God to the minds of men through word and action and life. For the conscious outreach of the soul must be taken as the point of approach from God to man; and the object of all religious devotion and practice cannot be less than communion with God. As the influence of Jesus is brought to bear upon men on this intelligible level, men receive the highest blessing in a closer fellowship with God. God in us is a poorer idea than God for us.

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Chapter VIII.

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Chapter VIII.

Conclusion

The church as a whole was slow to take the action against Irving which was so ardently advocated by his opponents. In May 1829, the year following the open declaration of his belief in the "sinfulness of Christ's humanity", he went to Scotland at the time of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He attempted to sit in that body as an elder from the church at Annan. But in spite of the strong support of his friends he was refused that privilege. The purpose of his visit was nevertheless achieved in a series of early morning addresses in the Hope Park Chapel during the sessions of the Assembly. There he discoursed upon the Book of Revelation, but on other occasions he spoke freely on the subject of Christ's humanity. Cole's letter had appeared a year before, and it is remarkable that the Assembly at this time took no note of the heterodoxy with which it charged Irving.

The first official notice of the matter came in connection with the presentation of the Rev. Hugh Baillie Maclean to the parish of Dreghorn in the County of Ayr, Presbytery of Irvine. Maclean had been in close

contact with Irving when the former was pastor of the London-Wall Chapel, and he seems to have fallen under the spell of the "humanity" doctrine of Irving. When Maclean was presented to the parish of Dreghorn, objection was raised because of his doctrine of the "peccability" of Christ. Presbytery asked him a number of questions, and on March 17, 1830 he made answer. His answer follows closely the doctrine of Christ's human nature as we found it set forth in Irving's works. ⁽¹⁾ He declared that he did "not believe that our Blessed Lord's human nature was, considered in itself, different in its properties and qualities from that of the children to whom he joined himself as a brother." It was "human nature as it was injured by sin", and so "was sin-accursed human nature"; yet that human nature open to every kind of temptation was upheld by the power of the Holy Ghost. This experience was necessary to his being constituted our example. Nowhere did Maclean affirm that Christ was peccable, as the heritors and people of Dreghorn had charged. On appeal to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, the Synod sustained the judgment of the Presbytery against Maclean, and the

(1) Pamphlet: Case of Rev. Hugh Bailie Maclean, late of London-Wall Chapel, presentee in 1830 to Parish of Dreghorn in County of Ayr, Presbytery of Irvine.

case was appealed to the General Assembly. That body in May, 1830, reversed the decision of the Synod, and referred the case back to Presbytery to issue the call to Maclean, an action which would enable the people of Dreghorn to proceed against Maclean in regular manner. A year later the case came back to the Assembly, and that body deprived Maclean of his license to preach. Shortly after this decision the Assembly took up the case of the Rev. A. J. Scott of the Scotch Church, Woolwich. In the case of Scott Irving was more directly implicated.

The first meeting of Irving and Scott seems to have taken place in 1828 in Campbell's parish at Row. Irving was attracted to the vigorous, if independent, mind of Scott, and he took him to London to be his assistant. In the spring of 1830 Scott was called to the Scotch Church, Woolwich, and therefore his ordination by the Presbytery of London was in order. In his discourse on I Peter 3:18-20 before Presbytery he made the statement in connection with the phrase, "being put to death in the flesh", that Christ died as a "necessary consequence of his taking upon him a body infected with hereditary depravity and obnoxious to death, the wages of sin." It is highly probable that Scott came to this position through the influence of Irving. At any rate in the subsequent questioning Irving rose as Scott's

champion when the other members of Presbytery criticised these views. The discussion lasted from four o'clock in the afternoon till ten at night. The attack naturally centered on Irving. Finally a committee was appointed to examine the doctrine of Christ's humanity; and that committee summed up its opinion in a statement in which Irving acquiesced: "That the Son of God took human nature of the substance of his mother, which (human nature) was wholly and perfectly sanctified by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the act of conception, and was upheld in the same state by the same power of the Holy Ghost, and underwent no process or progress of sanctification, as it needed none."⁽¹⁾ The statement reveals a lack of clear thinking on both sides. The members of the committee apparently conceived of sanctification in almost physical terms, while Irving on his part must have overlooked the last phrase, "no process - - of sanctification", for it is such a process that is at the foundation of his idea of Christ's moral example.

The matter did not end there, and private

(1) A Brief Statement of the Proceedings of the London Presbytery --- in the case of the Rev. Edward Irving and of a book written by him and entitled "The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature" 1831

conferences were held with Irving. On October 12th of the same year Irving with surprizing boldness preached before Presbytery on the doctrine at issue. A week later it was moved in Presbytery to look into the doctrine and to obtain satisfaction for certain stataments in "The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine" which had appeared early in that year. Irving of course opposed the motion, and refused to be judged by the Presbytery of London from whose judgment there was no appeal. Irving's position was an anomalous one, for he had been ordained by the Presbytery of Annan, and yet he was under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of London which was a law unto itself. For Irving refused to see that he had gone out from under the authority of the Church of Scotland. Rather than be severed from that body he broke with the Presbytery of London. He withdrew. Nevertheless the committee was appointed to examine the book and compare its statements with the Bible and the standards of the Church of Scotland. Irving protested in a letter to Presbytery because they had ignored Jesus' word, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." (Matthew 18:15) In answer to this protest Presbytery

claimed that it was not a satisfactory apology and could not be entered on the records because Irving had withdrawn from Presbytery. That body declared that he could not withdraw, and sent him an injunction to return.

On December 14th Presbytery accepted the report of the committee on Irving's book, in which Irving was charged with the error of imputing to Christ original sin. Many quotations were made to substantiate the charge. The committee declared that it was no escape from this conclusion to say that Christ's fallen nature could be considered apart from the person of Christ. The committee found that this doctrine of a sinful humanity in Christ affected the doctrines of atonement which the Church held.

The Presbytery further declared that Irving should no longer be a member of the court nor be capable of being readmitted to the same until he had recognized its authority and renounced his errors. Scott had meanwhile withdrawn his application for ordination because of objections to the ordination itself. Presbytery thought that the case was closed.

But Irving would have the last word. He answered with a declaration dated December 15th, and signed by his elders, his deacons, and his assistant, David Brown. In this open letter he set forth a brief statement of the doctrine concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ which was "constantly taught in this church, agreeable to the standards of the Church of Scotland, and the Word of God." Over these signatures he declared, "We utterly detest and abhor any doctrine that would charge with sin, original or actual, our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whom we worship and adore as 'the very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father; who, when the fulness of the time was come, did take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin' - 'very God and very Man', yet one. Christ, the only Mediator between God and Man, who in the days of his flesh was 'holy, harmless, undefiled and full of grace and truth;' who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God; 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world' ----." The declaration as it stood was orthodox, but it

represented Irving's true position only by that latitude of language which was the bane of the whole controversy. It left some things unsaid.

So the matter rested, Irving on his part rejecting the authority of Presbytery, and Presbytery on its part retaining its legal authority over the Church, yet refraining from an open trial of its recalcitrant minister. Within the year another element appeared which was to force the hands of Presbytery. On October 16, (1) 1831 the gift of tongues sprang up in the Regent Square Church. It was followed by the wildest excitement, and throngs filled the Church to see and hear the new wonder. At first Irving tried to keep the "tongues" from speaking out in the public services of the Church, but within a few weeks he concluded that this action would be a restraint of the voice of God (which Irving believed the tongues to be). Apparently there was rumor of opposition on the part of the trustees, for Irving wrote an explanatory letter to them indicating the change in the order of service (November 22, 1831). The trustees tried to effect a compromise by which Irving was to confine the

(1) The exact date is variously given.

speaking of the tongues to week-day meetings.

When this failed, the Session was called to consider the matter, but their arguments and entreaties were in vain. The firm conviction of Irving in the validity of these outbursts may be seen in the opening words of his letter to the Session December 24, 1831: "There is nothing which I would not surrender to you, even to my life, except to hinder or retard in any way what I most clearly discern to be the work of God's Holy Spirit - - ." His conviction is all the more wonderful in view of the fact that he himself was not included in the gifted ones.

The manifestations continued to break into the dignity of the Sunday services, and Irving continued steadfast in spite of all remonstrance and argument. He believed that this was an outpouring of the Spirit. The trustees were at last forced to action. They sent a delegation to Irving to obtain his final opinion. When he remained obdurate, complaint was sent to Presbytery for the trial of the case (March 22, 1832). The complaint cited the interruption of church services by "tongues" contrary to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of Scotland, and urged the removal of Irving from the National Scotch Church.

The trial before the Presbytery of London had no direct bearing upon Irving's doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the complaint the trustees had purposely ignored the fact "that there had been other charges brought against the said Rev. Irving, touching certain doctrines promulgated by him respecting the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ." Their charge of deviation from the standards of the Church of Scotland in the order of worship was practically proved before the case ever came to trial. But Irving in his four hour defence refused to stay by the original charge. He declared that it was the Holy Spirit, not individuals, who spoke in his church; and who was he to gainsay the Spirit's action? The accusation and the defence were on different issues, and the trial brought out no new features of either. Reference was made to the doctrine of the sinful humanity of Christ, but it was clearly beyond the limits of the case.. On May 2nd Presbytery handed down the decision that the charges were fully proved and that Irving was no longer fit to remain as minister of the National Scotch Church. Presbytery had done the only thing which it could do under the circumstances, and Irving on his side had stood manfully by his position that the "tongues" were a true manifestation of the Spirit. The doors of the

Church were now closed upon him, and he went elsewhere with the members of the Church who were faithful to him to seek a meeting house for the new service of worship.

In the same month the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland also took action against Irving. In May 1831 that body had condemned his writing, "Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine", as heretical. A year later the Assembly directed the Presbytery of Annan to proceed against Irving, for Irving had steadily maintained that he was under the jurisdiction of the Assembly by virtue of the fact that he belonged to the Presbytery of Annan. That Presbytery sent a letter to Irving asking him to avow the authorship of three works: (1) "Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine", (2) "Day of Pentecost", (3) an article in the Morning Watch concerning the judgment of the Assembly in 1831 against Campbell, Scott, Maclean and Irving. Irving replied with a full avowal of the authorship of these tracts and a restatement of the positions which he set forth in them.

The libel which Presbytery then drafted charged him with holding the heretical doctrine of "the fallen state and sinfulness of our Lord's human

nature" and quoted numerous extracts from the three documents in support of the charge. ⁽¹⁾ The passages quoted were of course the extreme utterances of Irving on the subject, and from Presbytery's point of view and use of language they clearly proved the libel. The libel was sent to Irving, and on February 6, 1833 he wrote his answer to the Moderator: "I have read over these extracts, and can find in them no doctrine charging our Lord's human nature with sin, but contrariwise, every one of them doth assert his human nature to be holy as his divine, which is no less holy than the holy God himself." Only by a severe adjustment of language and idea could Irving say this in the face of such statements as the following, quoted in Presbytery's libel from "Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine": "Manhood, after the fall, broke out into sins of every name and aggravation, corrupt to the very heart's core, and, from the centre of its inmost will, sending out streams as black as hell. This is the human nature, which every man is clothed withal, which the Son of Man was clothed upon withal, bristling thick and strong with sin, like the hairs

(1) See "Trial of Mr. Edward Irving before the Presbytery of Annan 1833 - printed at the Journal Office".

upon the Porcupine." (1) In the same letter Irving declared that the Presbytery had no jurisdiction over him, but that "both for truth's sake, which hath been sorely perverted amongst you and throughout Scotland, and also for the sake of Christ's honor, in the person of me His poor servant insulted" he would appear at their bar for trial. We can catch the note of self-pitying martyrdom in his words.

The trial was set for March 13, 1833 at Annan. Irving arrived with his friends, Mr. Robert Smith, Mr. David Dow, Mr. David Ker and Mr. Nivan, on the morning of the trial. Large crowds came to see this son of the village who had been accused of heresy. Presbytery on that day was made up of the following: Rev. Mr. Roddick of Gretna, Rev. Mr. Sloan of Dornock, Rev. Mr. Nivison of Middlebie, Rev. Mr. Duncan of Ruthwell, Rev. Mr. Gillespie of Hodham, Rev. Mr. Monilaws of Annan. Presbytery was opened in the usual manner, and the libel was read. When Irving was asked as to the truth of the libel charging him with teaching that Christ's human nature was fallen and sinful, he answered, "If I have said so, and that God made it not sinless, then is the libel true, and

then do I deserve all the pains of hell for having taught such doctrine; but if I have said and taught (that) Christ was fashioned as a man, that he took our sinful nature upon him, but that, by the grace of God, he was upheld, and yielded not to the motives of that sinful nature, then is it a glorious doctrine, and I will maintain it, yea, even unto death."⁽¹⁾ The members of Presbytery discussed the relevancy of the libel. The Moderator in his speech admitted that Irving upheld the holiness of Christ, as Irving's words just quoted indicated, but the Moderator went on to say that Irving "made use of such uncommon and unguarded expressions as have a manifest tendency to mislead all those who have not the same comprehensive views of the subject as himself."⁽²⁾ The Moderator urged that the "peccability of our Lord's human nature" be added to the libel, for this had been part of the charge preferred against Maclean. Upon motion of Presbytery this phrase was inserted.

Irving arose to defend himself. For two hours he spoke in defence of his views: "The doctrine which I maintain in the first of the books libelled on, is

(1) Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M.
by William Jones, M.A. London 1835

(2) Trial of Mr. Edward Irving before Presbytery of Annan.

expressed in the words of the holy Apostle Paul - 'Jesus Christ, our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.' And the doctrine which I maintain in the second of these books, is expressed in the verse following - 'And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.' And the doctrine contained in the article in the 'Morning Watch', is this, that a heretic, after the first and second admonition, should be rejected." Irving declared that he had rejected the General Assembly after three admonishings! His defence was in large measure a repetition of his doctrine already set forth: Christ was one with us in flesh and experience of temptation in order that he might be the Captain of our salvation. But his holiness was beyond question. This doctrine of sinlessness in a sinful nature was of superior importance to its expression in his book: "Let this book be burnt. Yea, let every copy of the book be burnt. I care not for the book. Away with it! - but the doctrine never can be, and never will be lost till the Lord returns." We catch again the note of self-pity: "Mock me not by speaking of popularity. Ye know not what I have suffered - ye know not what it is to be

severed from a flock you love - to be banished from your own house - to be driven from the place of worship in which you have been honoured as God's servant by the tokens of his approbation."

After Irving was removed from the bar, the members of the Presbytery were polled. Their counter-arguments were what might be expected from men schooled in the Westminster Confession. There seems to have been no disposition on their part to look at the heretical doctrine from Irving's point of view, nor to seek another interpretation of Christ's humanity apart from the traditional one. Every member except Sloan said that Irving was guilty of the charge contained in the libel.

Before sentence was pronounced, Sloan was called upon to offer prayer. As Presbytery and people, accusers and accused, bowed their heads in the now dimly lighted Church, a "tongue" broke out, wildly urging them to flee. It was grimly reminiscent of that other trial in which Irving had been cast from his Church because of the "gifts". Now in blind obedience to the "voice" (Dow's) Irving and Dow strode out of the Church never to return. Presbytery pronounced the sentence of deposition. On this tragic day in the very Church where he had been ordained,

Irving was condemned as a heretic.

From the proceedings it is clear that the trial was largely a matter of judicial form, and that the issue was to be expected. Out of his own mouth Irving had condemned himself. The libel was proven. Presbytery never questioned whether the charge was sufficient to cast a man from the Church. The charge was based upon Irving's foolish use of words, for Irving on his part had been too wrapped up in the statement of his own opinions to see their possible misconstruction. In spite of rash statements that might be interpreted to the contrary Presbytery knew that he believed in the sinlessness of Jesus. Should not that judicial body have regarded the trend of his thought rather than the wildness of his words?

Carlyle's characterization of the proceedings is interesting: "A poor aggregate of Reverend Sticks in black gown, sitting in Presbytery, to pass formal condemnation on a Man and a Cause which might have been tried in Patmos, under the Presidency of St. John, without the right truth of it being got at!"⁽¹⁾

Thus Irving was cast out as a heretic from his mother Church. The progress to this climax was a matter of years, and it is interesting to trace Irving's

(1) Carlyle's Reminiscences Vol. II Page 208

attitude toward that Church through these years when the clouds of ecclesiastical condemnation were gathering about him.

In 1831 at the time when Irving was questioning the wisdom of the decisions of the General Assembly, the Edinburgh Christian Instructor reminded Irving of the vow which he had taken for ordination (1822): "Do you promise to submit yourself willingly and humbly, in the spirit of meekness, unto the admonitions of this Presbytery, and to be subject to them, and all other Presbyteries and superior judicatories of this church, where God in his providence shall cast your lot; and that, according to your power, you shall maintain the unity and peace of this church against error and schism, notwithstanding of whatsoever trouble and persecution may arise; and that you shall follow no divisive courses from the present established doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this church?"⁽¹⁾ It is only reasonable to presume that Irving took this vow in full faith and without mental reservations, and it must be said that Irving never did voluntarily break with what he considered to be the true Church of Christ. But before

(1) Communication by "Pastor" - September 1831

many years had passed there came a shift of emphasis from the modern to the ancient church. In an ordination charge to the minister of the Scots Church, London Wall, March 1827, Irving urged his brother to "be zealous for the good primitive customs of the church", and he gave him this injunction, "Abjure thou the prudential maxims of this metallic age." Things ancient and established had a profound fascination for him: in the Fast Day Sermon before London Presbytery the next year (1828) he spoke on "The ancient Fulness and Purity of the Kirk of Scotland". Thus far he apparently saw little divergence between the ancient and the modern, and his allegiance was absolute: "I do battle under the standards of the church under which my fathers fell. - - I am a man sworn to discipline and must abide by my standard, and may not leave it, but fall beside it, or fall above it, and yield to it the last shelter and rampart of my fallen body."⁽¹⁾

The same deferential spirit is apparent in a letter written the next year to Dr. Chalmers, in which he sought to know "whether the Church permit baptism by

(1) Apology for the ancient Fulness and Purity of the Kirk of Scotland.

(1)
 immersion or not." Thus far there had risen in his mind no question concerning the authority of the governing body of the church. In May 1829 he attempted to sit in the General Assembly as an elder from Annan, for his own church in London was outside of the bounds of the Scottish church. Irving spoke in defence of his right to a seat, and among other things said, "If I disobey, can you not call me to your bar? and, if I come not, have you not your court of contumacy wherewith to reach me? If I offend in any great matter - which I would fain hope is little likely - can you not pronounce against me the sentence of the lesser or the greater excommunication?"
 (2)

The next two years were taken up with the opening skirmishes of controversy, and Irving's attitude toward the church began to change. At first this change appeared only in his attitude toward the Presbytery of London. When that body started to take action against his pamphlet, "The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature", Irving renounced its authority over him. Then in May 1831 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland condemned the same writing, and Irving replied

(1) Life of Irving by Mrs. Oliphant - Vol. II Pages 68,69

(2) Same - Vol. II Page 81

with an article in the Morning Watch entitled
 "A Judgment as to what course the Ministers and
 the People of the Church of Scotland should take
 in Consequence of the Decisions of the Last
 General Assembly"⁽¹⁾. It was a condemnation of
 the decisions against Campbell, Maclean, Scott
 and himself, for, he wrote, the Assembly had
 denied that God is love, that Christ was truly
 incarnated in fallen humanity, that there is a
 place for the presence and power of the Holy
 Ghost, that men have the right of appeal to the
 Scriptures. Irving even went to the extreme of
 questioning the integrity of the members of the
 Assembly: "The duty which the Christian people
 owe to those ministers, who, in the General
 Assembly, did give their condemnation to this
 doctrine, by which we hold the Head, is, in their
 several parishes, to go boldly in, and ask them
 to their face, if they believe that Christ came
 in flesh, and had the law of the flesh, and the
 temptations of flesh to struggle with and overcome;
 and, if they confess not to this doctrine, to de-
 :nounce them, as wolves in sheep's clothing, and
by no means to hear them, or honour them any more

(1) Morning Watch - Vol. V Page 84

as Ministers of Christ, but as Ministers of Antichrist."

In the publication of his next book (The Confessions of Faith and the Books of Discipline of the Church, of date Anterior to the Westminster Confession. To which are prefixed a Historical View of the Church of Scotland) Irving sought to bring "the almost desperate Church of Scotland" back to its original standards. Of course the insinuation was that the Church had departed from those standards. It would seem that Irving was courting trouble when he signed himself on the title page, "Minister of the National Scotch Church, and Author of 'The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine --'". In this book we can see a considerable freedom in his attitude toward the authority of these creeds. He singled out the Scottish Confession as having superior merit. He advocated changes in Craig's Catechism. He denominated the Westminster Confession as "an issue of republican and revolutionary principles", and he went on to say, "I never liked that assembly, and would ^{much} rather our church had never adopted its books." "For many reasons I greatly postpone it to our original standards; under which it

ranks, and is subordinated, not they under it." (1)
 It must be remembered that the Westminster Con-
 :fession had been used freely in criticism of
 Irving's doctrine of Christ's fallen humanity,
 and whatever preference he may originally have
 had for the earlier documents was probably in-
 creased by this use of the later creed. Here he
 practically renounced its authority: "It is really
 an imposition upon a man's conscience to ask him
 to subscribe such a minute document." It becomes
 increasingly evident that Irving was slowly sever-
 :ing the ties which bound him to things established.

At the same time a spirit of independence
 was creeping in to take the place of church authority.
 In the same year the "Baptism with the Holy Ghost"
 appeared, and of course its theme tended toward a
 modern and independent conception of authority.
 Irving wrote with a free hand: "Neither say unto me,
 'And what art thou, who presumest to pass beyond the
 Luthers and Calvins?' I am a minister of Christ, as
 well as they; one as near to God as they; to whom
 his book is as free as to them; and I seek to occupy
 the work of my day and generation, as they also did." (2)

(1) The Confessions of Faith and Books of Discipline
 Page 61

(2) Baptism with the Holy Ghost - Page 29

It was a legitimate utterance; but coming out of the heat of his controversy with the orthodox church it was not politic and could only stir up further strife.

In the passion of the London trial (1832) his references to creed and authority were in the same vein. When the Westminster Confession was brought up, Irving declared that it was absurd that "the decision of a council that sat at Westminster in turbulent and rebellious times, is to bind up the tongue of every preacher, so that he shall preach nothing but what is therein contained". He affirmed that he was responsible to Christ and Christ alone for what he did. Nothing could come between Christ and the individual believer without danger of its being the Antichrist. "I deny the doctrine," he said, "that it is needful for a minister to go to the General Assembly before he does his duty. I deny the doctrine that he can be required to go up to the General Assembly for authority to enable him to do that which he discerneth to be his duty." As set down in the court records it was a declaration of independence, and in spirit Irving had practically severed himself from every authoritative church.

The order of deposition from the National

Scotch Church in London naturally confirmed this freedom. And the final trial before the Presbytery of Annan provided an opportunity for the open expression of this position in its broadest terms. In the letter to Presbytery in which he avowed the authorship of the tracts in question, he spoke of the General Assembly as "one of the most wicked of all God's enemies on the face of the earth", a "Synagogue of Satan" which he hated "with a perfect hatred". In this letter which was penned before the trial had taken place Irving gave up all his relationship to the mother church: "With that wicked Assembly, and with all who adhere to, or in any way aid or abet its evil deeds, I can maintain no relationship, but that of avowed and open enmity."⁽¹⁾

The trial itself brought out only a reiteration of these sentiments. The General Assembly was a "wicked assembly" and its authority was subordinate to that of conscience: "Why should we submit our consciences to any General Assembly? Ye are men." And then Irving's dramatic withdrawal from the court before sentence was passed indicated

(1) Trial of Mr. Edward Irving before Presbytery of Annan 1833 - printed at Journal Office

that he did not count himself subject to its jurisdiction. The only course now open to the Presbytery of Annan was to declare him deposed from the Church of Scotland. Through criticism and censure Irving's attitude had changed from that of a devoted son to that of an avowed enemy.

Irving now launched on his independent course. But the independence was only in name, and the course was very short. The newly founded Church swallowed up its master-spirit in a maze of "apostolic" orders and forms. The "Morning Watch" died within a few months, and the only utterances we catch from Irving are in the pages of the "Watchman". His sermons appear to have had a mystical directness with less of the wordy circumlocutions of earlier days. For almost two years after the trial at Annan he continued on, faithfully adhering to the erratic course of the new prophets of the "apostolic" church. But his spirit seems to have been broken, and his physical strength had already been exhausted in the tremendous labours to which he had applied himself. In September 1834 he started on a mission to Scotland, going by slow stages through Wales and England. But his physical condition became aggravated by the exposures of the journey, and he sent for his wife to join him in Liverpool, for he could no longer travel

alone. From there they journeyed by boat to Glasgow. Here on December 7th, 1833 Edward Irving died. With unfaltering faith he passed through "the last sad and dismal vale", as he called death, and his last recorded words were in keeping with the spirit and temper of his life, "If I die, I die unto the Lord".

Thus passed the mighty figure of Irving from the earth. His terrific energy and unyielding devotion exhausted his physical powers and drove him in headlong course in spite of his better powers of discretion and spiritual insight. As Carlyle said, "He might have been so many things." But in the apparent gloom of his tragic end we must not lose sight of the light which he cast upon certain aspects of our faith. From some of his extreme emphases the Church has reacted to a clearer vision of the truth. In the emphasis which he placed upon the true humanity of Christ the Church must count itself a debtor to Edward Irving.

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Irving's Works

A Judgment, as to what course the Ministers and
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General Assembly by the Rev. Edward Irving

Morning Watch No.13

An Apology for the Ancient Fulness and Purity
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London MDCCCXXXI

The Confessions of Faith and the Books of Discipline
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London MDCCCXXXI

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Brief Statement of the Proceedings of the London
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of a Book written by him and entitled "The Orthodox and
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1831

The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M. before the
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London 1833

Trial of Mr. Edward Irving, Late Minister of the
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Dumfries: printed at the Journal Office

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 March 4, 1832
 April 26, 1832
 May 6, 1832
 August 8, 1832
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A Letter to the King on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Laws - by the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M.
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Addendum:

An interesting side-light on Edward Irving has appeared in "The Western Echo", published by Western Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pannsylvania. In 1829 Dr. A.D. Campbell was in England, and he has given the following portrait of Edward Irving:

"On the 4th of June I visited the Rev. Edward Irving. I found Mr. Irving walking about with his child in his arms in a green plot before his house. He is said to be exceedingly fond of his family. I knew him immediately from the description I had of him, and made myself known. His appearance was very singular, quite primitive. He was about five feet ten or six feet high, black bushy hair hanging in ringlets over his shoulders, black velvet cap on his head, and plain breasted coat, with a countenance exceedingly peculiar. There was in it the lines of thought with a mildness of expression. He has a defect in the cast of his eyes, which gave his face an unique appearance. From the view I had of him I saw that he was no ordinary man.

"* * * * * It appeared to be a prevalent opinion with all classes, however much in fault he was from his strange opinions, that he was a good man and very amiable in private life. * * * * *

"On another occasion I heard Mr. Irving preach. His remarks about other denominations were very liberal, particularly with respect to Dissenters. He reiterated at that time his notion with respect to Christ's human nature being sinful. He had not then broached the unknown tongue heresy. It was to be regretted that a person so amiable in private life should have been so indiscreet in his public ministrations.

"The manner of Mr. Irving in preaching was very peculiar, his sarcasm caustic in the extreme, his sneer withering, his gesticulations strange, his attitudes were according to no rule of elocution, his pronunciations full of Scotchisms when excited. When I take into consideration the manner of his discussing subjects, his genius, the singular expression and contortion of his countenance, his power over his body in stretching himself out to appear much larger than he really was, his black visage and flowing hair, he looked like a being of another age. If I could judge at all from the manner of Mr. Irving and his mode of illustrating subjects, I should suppose he imagines he has such views of truth which the great mass of ministers and people have not, that he is constrained to make them known whatever might be the consequences."